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AN ABSENT- MINDED WAR

BY A BRITISH OFFICER



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John Ross

Cairnes, William E. (ed.)

AN ABSENT-MINDED WAR

BEING SOME REFLECTIONS
ON OUR REVERSES AND
THE CAUSES WHICH HAVE
LED TO THEM . . .

By A BRITISH OFFICER



JOHN MILNE ♥ ♥

12 NORFOLK ST., STRAND

LONDON. 1900 ♥ ♥

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AN ABSENT-MINDED WAR

CHAPTER I

A WAR AND THE ARMY

Absent-minded Methods—Our Training for War
—Some General Criticisms—Sir Redvers
Buller and a Parable.

EVERYONE has lately been familiar with the expression "the absent-minded beggar," the description so happily applied by Mr. Kipling to our dashing, daring, thoughtless, happy-go-lucky Tommy Atkins. It does not seem to have occurred to many people that the epithet of "absented-minded" can be applied with equal correctness

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to Tommy's officers, from the highest to the lowest, and even to the Government at whose orders he has cheerfully marched to almost certain death on occasions without number.

We have lately seen large and well-equipped British armies, the largest and the best equipped which have ever left our shores, or indeed have ever left the shores of any country in the world since the world began, brought to a standstill, foiled, and humiliated, with the loss of many thousands of prisoners, killed, and wounded, and this by a nation of peasants who have never worn a uniform in their lives, who are ignorant (I except one or two of their leaders) of the very rudiments of strategy and tactics, and who apparently have no points in their favour but their mobility, their knowledge of the country in which they were fighting,

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and their familiarity with the use of the rifle. Why is it that we have found it impossible to subdue an army which cannot exceed some sixty thousand of fighting men, at the highest estimate, till we had placed over two hundred thousand troops in the field to oppose them?

Is it that the British soldier has deteriorated? Is it that he is less brave or is led with less dash than of yore? That the answer to these questions must be emphatically in the negative is obvious to the most carping critic. Nothing could possibly be more splendid, more entirely admirable, than the firm and enduring courage of our soldiers; nothing could be more brilliant or more self-sacrificing than the dauntless bravery shown on every occasion, without a single exception, by their officers. Is it not then sufficient for an army to

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be animated with the highest courage and with the most self-sacrificing spirit to ensure success in battle? The answer to this question has been afforded by the events of the last few months, and is equally emphatically in the negative. Courage is still a necessary attribute in the soldier, but courage unscientifically directed leads more certainly to loss of life than to success, and no amount of courage can possibly compensate for any inferiority in skill in the use of the weapons with which the soldier is armed.

Were our soldiers then unscientifically led, or are they deficient in that skill with their weapons which alone can command success?

To both these questions I have no hesitation in replying in the affirmative. The valour of our troops has been sadly wasted, owing both to the

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want of intelligence in their leaders, and to the reckless manner in which they have been denied opportunities for practice with the splendid weapons with which they are armed.

Our preparations for war have hitherto been made in an "absent-minded" manner, as if war were the last thing for which soldiers were likely to be required, and the energies of our officers, especially those of the higher ranks, have been directed with singular imbecility into channels where they have been absolutely wasted. Many of our most ambitious and most capable officers have had their natural abilities stunted and misdirected by the useless training to which they have been subjected; all originality of thought, all effort after a more correct appreciation of the true tactics of the future, has been ruthlessly squelched by authority;

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mediocrity, if assisted by influential friends so much the better, has been pushed to the front, with the result which we are now all able to see for ourselves and to deplore.

From the day on which the soldier joins his regiment, whether as officer or man, his time is occupied in a variety of duties of which not one-tenth forms any useful training for war ; in the same manner, no article of his clothing or equipment, from the spike of his helmet to the sole of his ammunition boot, from the glittering badges on his collar to the bright spurs upon his heel, is such as it will be possible for him to wear in warfare on the field of battle if he wish to escape the bullets of the enemy.

While the officer spends most of his time in the hunting-field, on the polo or cricket ground, in the boudoir or in "town," the soldier finds most of

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his time taken up with fatigues and guards, though, like his officer, he too finds plenty of leisure for amusements, which usually take the form of football or cricket in the afternoons, followed by evenings spent in the canteen or in congenial female society out of barracks.

It has for long been perfectly plain to all soldiers who have taken the trouble to occupy themselves with speculation as to the form which warfare of the future would take, that the flat trajectory and enormous rapidity of fire of modern weapons would render attack impossible except by troops who had been thoroughly taught to act and to think for themselves when under fire, whose *moral* had been improved by the inculcation of habits of self-denial and abstinence, who had been trained to avail themselves of the smallest inequalities in the ground

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between them and their enemy, and who had been made thoroughly expert with their rifles.

I have no doubt that any member of the present military staff at the War Office would heartily agree with what I have just said. To succeed in battle, soldiers must be trained on the lines above laid down. This would probably be qualified by the War Office officials aforesaid by the assertion that there was not the least chance of British troops being ever called upon to face an enemy trained on European lines, and that our traditional hardihood, contempt for death, and high physical qualities would be amply sufficient, with a minimum of training, to ensure success against any semi-savage peoples such as we might reasonably expect to encounter. There has, I know, long been an impression among

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all classes of the inhabitants of these islands that the British army would never be called upon to face any foe but a savage one. That this view was not professedly shared by the higher authorities may be inferred from the fact that the Government were willing to find large sums of money for annual manœuvres, which would be quite thrown away if we were never going to be led against European troops.

As a matter of fact, these manœuvres were invariably conducted in such a ridiculous manner as to be absolutely useless as a means of training any individual in the army from one end of it to the other, excepting only a limited number of staff officers, who profess to have received a good many useful lessons from mistakes committed by both sides, especially during the last manœuvres on Salisbury Plain.

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The Government, however, have found the money, have said to the military authorities, "There's the money you want. Have your manœuvres; fight your toy battles with your toy soldiers and your toy staff, and be happy," and have looked on complacently at a succession of extraordinary operations founded on a series of incomprehensible "general" and "special" ideas, operations which invariably afforded the greatest possible entertainment to all the spectators, especially to the foreign officers who were sent over by their Governments to see the little English army playing at being a great weapon of war.

How marvellous it is that, in spite of all the mistakes, in spite of the ridiculous blunders of our leaders, in spite of the scandalous jobbery prevailing in the selection of officers for

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almost every post, that in spite of all this the English army is now proving itself to be a magnificent weapon after all. After all, did I say? Yes, but not till the "society" generals have been covered with derision, not till the butterfly staff officers have been exposed in all their incompetence, not till the war-worn and war-scarred heroes of the army have been dug out from the retirement in which they were eating out their hearts, and have been sent rejoicing to the front to instil new life and vigour into our plans, and to lead our undaunted soldiery from one triumph to another.

One after another have the pets of the War Office, the men arrogantly styling themselves "of the modern school," proved their hopeless incapacity for the leadership of troops in the field; time and again have the

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very men to whose hands has been entrusted the training of the British army for war, shown that they who are unfit to command are unfit to train. No man can teach what he does not himself understand. Generals whose sole experience has been in savage warfare, and who have not taken the trouble to attempt to fathom the problems of modern war, are hopelessly unfitted to superintend the peace training of troops who may be called upon to fight anywhere from Europe to China, and against any soldiers from the French or Russian to the negro tribes of Central Africa.

In one of his despatches from the seat of war, General Sir Redvers Buller concludes by saying, "I suppose our officers will learn the value of scouting in time ; but in spite of all one can say, up to this, our men seem

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to blunder into the midst of the enemy, and suffer accordingly." And who is more to blame for this than Sir Redvers Buller himself, who, as Adjutant-General of the army for several years, had every opportunity of seeing that our officers were being instructed on proper lines, and were being made to appreciate the importance of scouting and the best manner in which it should be performed? Did Sir Redvers Buller imagine that he could begin to instruct our officers in the rudiments of their profession when on the very battlefield itself? Verily, if he did think so, he has been cruelly undeceived.

His remark reminds me of an incident which I once witnessed at an inspection by the General Officer Commanding the District in which I happened at the time in question,

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some years ago, to be stationed. The battalion was engaged in practising "the attack," a form of exercise which is obviously more suited for the arena of the Agricultural Hall than for a realistic training for battle, but which is a favourite spectacle with generals, as it enables them to air their own theories at the expense of regimental commanding officers, and to look supernaturally wise with comparatively little intellectual effort. Well, the battalion was engaged in this complicated exercise; there was the usual amount of muttered objurgation by every officer at the officer or non-commissioned officer nearest to him who happened to be junior in rank; the adjutant was galloping about frantically to show off his zeal and intelligence at the expense of some individual in a less exalted position; the colonel was sweating at every

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pore between enthusiasm and apprehension, when some unlucky subaltern made a movement which violated brutally one of the pet theories of the general.

In an instant the general, hitherto rather lethargic after his inspection lunch, was on fire. He demanded furiously of the colonel, "What the—, why the—, etc. etc., was such a thing done in his battalion?" The colonel promptly—as is a way with colonels—offered up the youngster as a burnt-offering to the general. "That officer is a d—d fool, sir," was his method of consummating the sacrifice. But the general was not to be appeased. "Let me tell you, sir," he said, rising quite two inches in his stirrups and speaking in tones of muffled thunder, "that it is your business to teach him not to be a d—d fool." Perhaps my readers may now grasp the

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meaning in which lies the application of this parable. How can General Buller reasonably complain of his officers not being able to scout, when their want of ability to do so is due as much to him as to any other individual in the British army?

The fact is that for years past our officers and our men have been trained in an absent-minded manner; for years past the War Office has been equally absent-minded, acting as if a war were the last possible thing to be anticipated,—all of which is more due to the Government, and through the Government to Parliament, than to the soldier of any rank;—and finally, when war loomed threateningly on the horizon, all our preparations were conducted in the same sleepy, easy-going fashion, till the absent-mindedness of our generals

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at the seat of war suddenly woke the nation in earnest, and led to the infusion of some energy into the hitherto slipshod conduct of affairs.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAINING OF THE REGIMENTAL OFFICER

His Preparatory Studies — Qualifications for a Commission — His Life after Joining — His Military Duties—The Training of the Staff Officer—The Staff College—Staff Employment—German Influences and their Results.

I MUST now abandon generalities and descend to particulars. I want to describe to my readers in simple language the training and the mode of life of our officers, so that they can judge for themselves how little calculated it is to fit them for the serious duties of their profession. I propose first to deal with the training of the regimental officer, then with that of

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the staff officer, including those sacred beings general officers, and then I propose to descend to the other end of the scale and to give some account of the battle-training,—if there be any,—and of the mode of life of Tommy Atkins. From this description of the peace training of the individual I propose to wander on to a discussion of the preparations for the war which seems now to be happily entering on a brighter stage, and to pass from them to some reflections—not, I hope, ill-natured or inspired by more than a sincere desire to see our army made a more efficient fighting machine—on the conduct of the operations of this war up to the period when our fortunes began to mend.

The above is a rather ambitious programme for a little book of this description. Volumes could be filled without exhausting the subjects I

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have above enumerated. But the patience of my readers would be sadly threadbare by the time the end of the first fat volume had been reached, while I venture to hope that the few pages forming this little pamphlet may be able to fix the attention for a short half-hour.

Well, to commence with the regimental officer. Nowadays lads do not join their battalions without having undergone some military training, all commissions, except of course at a time of emergency like the present, being given to young men who have either graduated at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, or have put in not less than two trainings, not counting a course of recruit's drill, with a militia battalion. It must be understood that at present I am only dealing with regimental officers of our cavalry and infantry

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of the line, who after all form the largest proportion of the officers of our army, and upon whose efficiency or inefficiency most momentous results may depend.

First of all, what are the main qualifications which entitle a youth to aspire to a commission in Her Majesty's forces, apart from the ability to pass certain not particularly searching educational and physical tests? This will depend in great measure on the branch of the service which he wishes to belong to. If he will be content with the less showy rôle of an infantry officer, he must in the first place be what is commonly understood as a gentleman, a qualification which I hasten to add, to avoid misunderstanding, is also necessary for the candidate for a cavalry commission. That is to say, he must be in the habit of wearing decently

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cut clothes, he must be able to speak without dropping his h's, he must have a superficial acquaintance with the outward manners of so-called good society, and must be able to handle his knife and fork at dinner without exciting the disgust or reprobation of his messmates. Granted that he can do all this, it does not in the least matter who or what his father was, though, if he be wise and his father be not able to toe the line prescribed for the conduct of a gentleman as I have above defined it, he will do well to refrain from inviting him to share the hospitality of his mess.

All this sounds charmingly democratic. It really does not matter, you see, whether a lad is well or humbly born; all that is necessary is that he shall be able to outwardly conform to the recognised standard of gentility,

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and if the poor son of humble parents but of warlike tastes be able to meet these requirements, there is nothing to prevent him, if he can pass his examinations, from becoming a member of one of the smart battalions of Her Majesty's army. Well, there is one little consideration which I have omitted to mention. His relatives must be able to put down a hundred pounds or so to pay for his outfit, and must be in a position to make him an allowance of at least a hundred and fifty pounds a year for the whole of his service, unless he improve his opportunities and marry money. This is a little disconcerting to the democratic theory, though the theory remains sound enough. When the purchase system was abolished, now over thirty years ago, we were told that money, that is to say the power of the purse, was no longer to have

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any influence in army matters. The baton of the Field-Marshal was to be placed within the reach of the humblest individual in the kingdom, provided that his merit was sufficient to entitle him to the distinction; yet we now see that no one can possibly hope to aspire to a military career as a commissioned officer who cannot command an independent income of at least one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

If the aspirant after military glory hanker after the cavalry, the cash requirements are much greater. We have it on the high authority of the Under-Secretary for War himself, who denounced it as a scandal from his place in Parliament, that no one can exist in a cavalry regiment unless he be furnished with a private income of at least five hundred a year beside

y. In very many smart regi-

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ments such an allowance would be ridiculously inadequate; it may be taken as the minimum on which a careful youngster can exist in a quiet corps. I don't think Mr. Wyndham used too strong language when he called this a scandal, for a scandal it is, and one which may have the most serious consequences some of these days on the military history of this Empire. I can almost imagine I can see a monument erected to the memory of the departed British Empire, with an inscription in letters of brass—no, of gold, of course—to this effect: "Wrecked by a cavalry subaltern with a thousand a year."

To some of my non-military readers this may sound the veriest rhodomontade, but I can assure them that I am perfectly serious, as it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the duties which may at any

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moment fall to the cavalry subaltern in warfare. The junior officer of infantry may find himself in trying situations, in fact he is pretty certain to do so on service, but it will be exceedingly rare for him to find himself in a position of such enormous responsibility as that in which the cavalry officer, even of the most junior grade, may find himself at any moment in the course of a campaign. It is a truism that the mounted troops form the eyes and the ears of an army in the field. The army whose eyes are blind and whose ears are deaf is likely to fare poorly in a campaign.

Yet we see that in our service we trust the security of our forces to men whose principal recommendation is that they can command a private income of not less than five hundred pounds a year. It is obvious that, owing to the fact that cavalry officers

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require so large an income, there can only be a limited number of applicants for cavalry commissions, but our cavalry must be officered somehow, consequently we see that, owing to the absence of competition, ignoramuses who would not have a chance of a commission in the infantry of the line are gladly welcomed into the mounted branch, in which above all others high intelligence and a trained appreciation both of a country and of a tactical situation are particularly desirable. We have all heard enough of the manner in which faulty reconnaissance has led us in this campaign into one mess after another. When we reflect on the facts referred to above, this will cease to astonish us.

However, to resume my account of the training of our officers, all youngsters joining have, or should have, some elementary knowledge of the

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theory of modern warfare. They have proved their ability to answer a certain number of questions in tactics, in military topography, in military law, have read—under the supervision of a crammer with a keen eye for the foibles of examiners—a certain amount of military history, and are acquainted with some of the principles of military administration, and with some of the details of the organisation of the British army.

This is a foundation on which quite a respectable edifice of military knowledge might be raised, if anyone cared to take the trouble to see that the young soldier continued his studies. But such a thing is, as a general rule, the very last idea in his head. Once he is gazetted as a full-blown second lieutenant, he considers, in nine cases out of ten, that his

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education is complete. He is aware that he will have to pass in drill and interior economy before a board of officers before he can look for promotion to a higher rank, and he knows that he must renew his acquaintance with tactics, law, fortification, topography, and organisation before he can expect to receive his company. But the latter ordeal is now dim in the distance. Even the minor examination in drill need cause him no anxiety. It is almost an unheard of thing for an officer to be "spun" in A and B ; a friendly board usually sees to that ; in any case a few hours work for a couple of days before the exam. will put him all right, so the youngster throws his books to one side, and devotes himself heart and soul to the amusements which are to be found in most garrison towns.

His military duties will take up

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very little of his time. As a rule, he will have finished his work before lunch, and even during his working hours you will find that a considerable proportion of his time is spent lounging in the anteroom. I have often wondered what proportion of an officer's time is spent lounging in the anteroom. I am afraid that a perfectly appalling number of hours every week are thus wasted, hours which might easily be far more usefully employed.

After the young officer has put in his recruit's drill and his recruit's musketry and gymnastics, he will probably find that he will rarely spend more than some six hours in the week on parade, and these hours will be spent, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, in the stereotyped movements of battalion drill. If quartered in a large station, he may find himself

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on a brigade drill or field day once or even twice in the week, but these exercises will teach him nothing, and will probably bore him consumedly. His duty will be merely to walk about in rear of his section or company, if at close order drill; if at open order drill or manœuvre he may at first find his keenness somewhat stimulated by the mimicry of war, but if he stray from the beaten path of conventionality and try to think for himself and act for himself, he will undoubtedly be severely snubbed; so he will soon discover that originality does not pay, and that he will get on best if he merely let himself drift passively along with the tide of routine. Keenness is "bad form," as our youngster soon discovers; it is wrong to talk "shop," namely, to manifest any interest in his profession, and, finding all his efforts at seriously making himself a

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soldier thus snubbed, the average youngster will soon openly manifest his impatience to throw off his uniform,—the uniform he was so proud to put on for the first time,—and will devote himself to sport.

When it comes to his turn to go with his company to musketry, he may at first manage to get up a little interest in the work. Its novelty will amuse him. Anything is better than the infernal daily routine of barracks; the bi-weekly tour of orderly duty; the dreary drills on that hated square; the deadly monotony of those mornings spent loafing in the anteroom; the hours spent hanging about the orderly room with "crimes" to show or defaulter sheets to compare. But unless his captain be a keen shot and the company have a reputation to maintain, he will soon find that even musketry can become

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a very perfunctory business. In the first place, his prospects in the service are not in the least affected by the musketry efficiency of his company; nobody cares a "hang" whether the men shoot well or not, except possibly one or two enthusiastic officers, who are probably regarded by their comrades as being of doubtful sanity. And what the officer thinks beneath his notice, the soldier is not likely to find particularly interesting. It is true that Tommy's interest in musketry is quickened by the consideration that if he fail to get out of the third class he will find himself let in for a number of extra drills, besides being probably marked as ineligible for regimental employment; but it does not require a high standard of skill to become a second-class shot, and once out of the third class

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Tommy's interest in musketry — always excepting a few enthusiasts who meet with scanty encouragement — is at an end.

There is a delusion, I believe, in certain exalted circles that the prize-money stimulates the soldier to shoot ; that he will try to improve his shooting in order to win prizes. This sounds quite reasonable, but the men who labour under that delusion have failed to grasp the fact that prize-money is usually regarded in a company as so much beer to be equally divided when issued. However, the musketry course does not last long ; with good weather, a fortnight usually sees it over for the year, and except for a few rounds fired in company and battalion field-firing, and possibly a few more expended in so-called "field-practices," the young officer will see no more ball cart-

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ridges fired for another twelve months.

When he goes back to barracks he resumes the same uninteresting round, devoting his whole attention to his amusements, scrambling out of his uniform at the very first available opportunity, and taking as much leave as the state of his finances and the idiosyncrasies of his commanding officer will permit. As for any attempt to seriously study the difficult problems with which the science of modern warfare now fairly bristles, such an idea never enters his head. Certainly, unless it enter his head of its own accord, none of his brother-officers are in the least likely to put it there. Very possibly he may find himself "let in," as he would probably express it, for manœuvres, which are looked upon rather as an expensive nuisance than as an oppor-

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tunity for obtaining some insight into the mysteries of his profession.

And so his life goes on from year to year. In this fashion he drifts with his regiment from one station to another, visiting in turn all the garrisons, or a good many of them, where the Union Jack flies over the jolly, cheery, plucky, light-hearted British soldier. He gathers a certain amount of experience of men and things; he learns a lot about sport; he becomes an authority on wine and on tobacco; he becomes, in fact, one of the pleasantest of boon companions, one of the staunchest of "pals," but of *soldiering*, apart from the mere routine of barrack life, he learns little or nothing. It is not his fault; if turned into the right groove on joining his regiment, there is no one who would make a keener or more intelligent soldier, but his

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youthful zeal has been laughed at, his aspirations have been crushed, till at last he learns to pretend indifference to anything but the amusements of this life, and, needless to say, to the fascinations of active service. For of active service the British officer is inordinately fond. It may sound paradoxical of me to say so after the pains I have taken to show that the officer cares for nothing but sport, and scorns—as a rule—the serious study of his profession; but active service is regarded rather as a new and most exciting kind of sport, a feeling which has been heightened by our numerous campaigns against savages, than as a deadly serious business where the stakes are the lives of men and the safety of an empire.

The young soldier whose career I have just been endeavouring to follow

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is one of the average officers of the British army. But there is another class which cannot be overlooked; I refer to the more earnest men who are really ambitious of success in their profession, and who hanker after the loaves and fishes of staff employment. The thoughts of these young men naturally turn to a Staff College career. Without the *cachet* of the Staff College, their chance of staff employment is very remote, so these ambitious young men have recourse to crammers, to whom they pay much money, and unless unusually stupid, find themselves eventually one of the salt of the army and entitled to the letters p.s.c. after their names in the Army List. After one of these officers has thus reached the first stage in the career he has marked out for himself, we can imagine him examining him-

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self and asking himself if he were now a more finished soldier than before he entered the sacred portals at Camberley. What has he learnt in the two years spent at the principal educational establishment in the army?

I am afraid that the practical knowledge likely to be of use to him in warfare against a civilised foe is trifling indeed. He will have spent a certain amount of time, a considerable amount I should say, in endeavouring to become a good military map-maker. Unless he happened to have a natural bias in that direction, to have a natural taste for drawing, —in fact, a taste which is very far indeed from being universal, —the time which he will have spent in this fashion will have been practically wasted; but that is not regarded at the Staff College, where all, regard-

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less of their natural bent, have to go through the same mill. It is true that certain subjects, such as modern languages, may be taken up as an extra, but the general scope of the curriculum is the same for everyone, whatever his tastes may be. Besides spending long hours in sketching, the student will have passed many stale, weary, and unprofitable days in the study of the driest and most uninteresting details of military history, with special reference to the history of the Franco-German War. It is not too much to say that the official German history of that campaign still remains the Bible of the Staff College student, and this in spite of the fact that the invention of magazine rifles, of smokeless powder, and of quick-firing field guns, have vitally altered the conditions on the correct appreciation of which the tactics

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both of the attack and the defence depend.

Few things are likely to profit a military student more than the intelligent study of military history ; so few things are likely to do him more harm than to exalt the methods of the combatants in any campaign into a model to be slavishly followed, regardless of the altered conditions of the present day. The latter is the line taken at the Staff College, where the methods of the German Staff, as disclosed in the official history of the campaign of 1870-71, are held up to our students as a model to be adhered to as closely as possible on all occasions.

One result is that innumerable hours are spent in close study of the continental battlefields which might be much more profitably employed in investigations into different methods

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of economising transport, of increasing the mobility of armies, or of improving the fighting powers of the soldier, or even in studying the probable nature of the military problems likely to present themselves to a British general.

One consequence of the poverty of the result obtained by our present system of staff training is to be seen in the melancholy fact that no trustworthy map of Natal or of the Cape Colony, suitable for military purposes, had been prepared by the Intelligence Department, entirely controlled by Staff College graduates, during the many years which have elapsed since the Intelligence Department was first instituted. The only map of the Biggarsberg District in the northern portion of Natal which had been prepared under the auspices of the Intelligence Department was

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one on a scale of four miles to one inch, a scale which the present Commander-in-Chief remarked, with reference to a map on a similar scale prepared for the Salisbury Plain manœuvres, was so small as to be entirely valueless for tactical purposes.

However, let us suppose that our ambitious friend, having passed through the College course, obtains a staff appointment, let us say as Deputy - Assistant Adjutant - General in one of the Home Districts, the sort of appointment usually offered to a graduate in the rank of captain. I ought to postulate here that there is not much chance of our friend getting a staff appointment at all, unless his p.s.c. is backed up by a few friends at court. The Staff College certificate is all very well, but there are more graduates than

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there are appointments, and a number of these graduates will be nominees of the Commander-in-Chief who have entered the College by favour without passing any examination, and are pretty certain to get the pick of any good appointments going. However, if our friend have interest, and if he be wise he will not have gone to the College at all without a promise of some help on his obtaining the certificate, he may very possibly go from one snug billet to another, in defiance of the regulation that every officer on vacating a staff appointment must spend at least two years in regimental work.

This is a regulation which we borrowed from the Germans, by whom it is strictly adhered to, its object being to keep staff officers in touch with regimental officers, and to prevent the growth of a caste feeling

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between the staff and the regimental officers, which might have a most prejudicial effect on service. Our neglect of this regulation, whenever it was desirable to break it in favour of an officer with influential friends, has led to the establishment of a very strong prejudice amongst regimental officers against the more highly favoured comrade disporting himself on the staff. In fact, it is hardly too much to say that the Staff College graduate has become a byword and a reproach among regimental officers. The regimental officer feels that he has to bear the burden and heat of the day, and that the staff officer calmly appropriates all the rewards.

But to return for a moment to the progress in military efficiency of our staff officer as his staff career continues. We shall find that, so far from becoming a better soldier as

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time goes on, he becomes a better clerk and a worse soldier. He may have been a soldier when he took up his appointment; within the year he will have become a bureaucrat. He will have come to regard soldiers as machines, not as men; he will have grown afraid to assume the smallest responsibility, and his horizon will be entirely limited by the four walls of his office, which he will never leave except to don mufti and to look for recreation.

All that he may have managed to pick up at the Staff College as to staff duties in the field will soon fade from his mind. He will never be in the field. He will accompany his general on inspections, carrying a notebook, in which he will jot down that the cook-houses might have been cleaner, that the men's hair might have been better cut, that the saluting

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of some of the officers might be improved, that some men in a certain company had indifferent clothing, and so on. A couple of years of this sort of thing, on top of the Staff College course, is quite enough to turn most officers into prigs of the first water. When he is in his office his whole time is taken up with canteen business, regulating the prices at which contracts for groceries and beer are to be made throughout the district, or with minutely examining the proceedings of court-martials, to see if some unlucky president has omitted to number all the pages or to initial every erasure, or with an acrimonious correspondence with regimental commanding officers in the district on the subject of men being taken from the gymnasium for parade, or being left in off a brigade parade, or on some matter of equal importance.

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If his general be allowed to hold manœuvres in his district—and manœuvres are very rarely held except in some central place—he may get a few days' work in the field. The manœuvres will doubtless be characterised as a great success if the weather be fine, as a ghastly failure if the skies prove unkind; but whatever happens, the regimental officer will get all the blame, and the staff officers, whose clerks do all the work, will get all the credit.

Of staff duties as they should be conducted in the field, an officer so educated can have no knowledge that is not theoretical, and the result is plainly to be seen in the manner in which half our battles in South Africa have been fought on empty stomachs, so far as our men were concerned, and all of them have been, till Lord *R. B. Buller* took the field, more of the s to us than the

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result of a concerted movement working on a settled plan. Our staff officers have no notion of how to draft intelligible orders ; of this there can be no better evidence than is to be afforded by the orders issued before the recent battles in South Africa. Frequent orders and counter-orders are the surest sign of bad staff management. Anyone who has served in the present campaign will be able to tell you of the way in which battalions have been "messed about," sent first here and then there, then left without orders at all, in ignorance of the whereabouts of their camp, their baggage, or their rations.

One battalion was moved three times in one day, being finally brought back in a great hurry to its first halting-place. Unfortunately, the hurry had been so great that the whole of its tents had had to be left

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behind at the second halting-place, with the result that the battalion had to *stand* the whole night in a deluge of tropical rain, the only food in the men's stomachs being a hunk of bread which had fortunately been issued at the stopping-place where the tents had to be abandoned. That one night's misery and exposure sent several officers and men to hospital the next day. Bad staff management was the cause, nothing else. The absent-minded staff, as usual, badly sold the equally absent-minded regimental officer.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAINING OF THE GENERAL OFFICER

Mode of Selection (1) for Promotion, (2) for
Employment — Feminine Influences — The
Duties of a General Officer—How they fit
him for War.

IN the last chapter I promised to make some allusions to the training which our general officers have received to fit them for the responsibilities which have suddenly been placed upon their shoulders in the present campaign. Now this is a matter of some delicacy, as no one wishes less than I do to throw mud at or to attack by criticism officers who

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are engaged in difficult and dangerous operations in the face of the enemy.

It is, however, perfectly clear to everyone that the most extraordinary and inexcusable blunders have been made by more than one officer of high rank, and it is, I think, perfectly legitimate to investigate the methods in which these officers have been educated, in order to ascertain if there be anything in the manner of their education which is calculated to unfit them for the exercise of the higher duties of their profession. It must be understood that I do not personally attribute blame to any individual officer, that all my criticism is directed at the system which has made it possible that important commands should have been bestowed on men who have shown themselves to be quite unequal to the positions in which they have found themselves.

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How is a general officer trained? What sort of experience is he given to fit him for the exercise of an important command on active service? These questions are not easy to answer. In the first place, promotion to the rank of major-general may be either by selection or by seniority ; as things are at present, either process may equally well result in the promotion of a man quite unfitted for active employment. Where the claims of seniority are permitted to influence the appointment of an individual, it is quite plain that the mere fact of a man having served longer in the rank of colonel than his fellows is of itself no guarantee of his fitness ; if anything, rather the contrary. Age by itself is no qualification for command on the field of battle, and those who have the appointing of our generals should remember that the

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ultimate result of every such appointment may be that the man promoted may have to be entrusted with the conduct of the most difficult operations at a most critical moment in the history of his country.

Where the vacant appointment is filled by selection, it would at first sight appear to be probable that some sort of guarantee would exist that only the most fitting man would be promoted.

Anyone familiar with the ways of the War Office, and more particularly with the ways of the Promotion Board, knows quite well that no such guarantee exists. The reasons which influence the selection of officers for promotion to major-general may be any of the following: first and foremost, influence, friends in high positions, ladies who can pull the strings at the War Office, high social con-

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nections. The candidate who is backed in this manner may reckon with certainty, not only upon promotion, but also upon employment in his new rank. Few outsiders are aware of the extraordinary amount of weight which is attached by the War Office to the pleadings of certain highly placed individuals. I know of one talented lady who can obtain *any* vacant appointment for any of her friends. I will do her the justice to say that she does not rest satisfied with taking very little trouble to advance the cause of her protégés, but works for them heart and soul till she sees them safely enthroned in the position which her eloquence has won for them.

The second reason which will have influence with the Promotion Board is the past record of the candidate. This does not often enter into the

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question, but occasionally the valuable services and popularity of some officer render it inexpedient to pass him over, as suspicion might otherwise be aroused in the public mind as to the manner in which strings are pulled at the War Office, and the War Office is naturally bashful, and hates to do anything which might have the effect of directing the searchlight of public curiosity upon it.

There is a third reason which influences the War Office in making selections for appointment to the rank of general officer. What that third reason is I have never yet been able to find out. That there must be a third reason is quite obvious, from the fact that occasionally men are promoted to major-general who have neither influential friends nor high professional attainments to recommend them; the why and wherefore

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of these appointments has always been a mystery to me and to the rest of the outside world, but the appointments have been made, and there is an end of it.

Now comes the question of employing the officers who have been promoted. As there are more major-generals than there are major-generals' billets, it is quite clear that a considerable number of these officers can never hope for employment, but will have to vegetate on half-pay till they decide, in disgust, to "chuck it," and go in for their pensions. The selection of officers to fill commands as they become vacant settles itself with beautiful simplicity. Very few of them, I might almost say none of them, can possibly be held by any officer who has not considerable private means. The advantage of this arrangement is obvious. Public

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objection can be quieted by the simple process of offering any vacant appointment to the poor but distinguished officers in turn, knowing full well that it will be absolutely impossible for them to afford to accept it. If any unpleasant questions are afterwards asked as to the reasons why such or such a distinguished officer remains unemployed, the answer is obvious. He was offered employment on several occasions, but on each occasion he declined the offer. No answer could more effectually silence criticism.

According to Mr. George Wyndham, it is a national scandal and a national danger that commissions in our cavalry and infantry can only be accepted by young men with an income of five hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds a year respectively. I think it is a much more serious scandal and a much graver national danger that only

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wealthy men can hope for employment in the rank of a general officer.

However, suppose that the officer whose career we are following does obtain a command at home, let us see what sort of experience he is likely to gain in his new appointment to fit him for the exercise of command on active service. Suppose, in the first place, that he be given command of one of the infantry brigades at Aldershot, the centre of military activity in this country. Here he will get a certain amount of practice in the handling of troops. In the winter on several days in the month he will be permitted to arrange time marches, combined with tactical exercises, for his brigade ; in the spring he will be able to drill his command, first in close order, afterwards at manœuvre, for three or four days a week for a month on end. Later in the year he will

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have to handle his brigade on field-days, under the supervision and conforming to the orders of the Lieutenant-General in command of the Aldershot Division; and in the autumn he may, if he be fortunate, be allowed to command his brigade on manœuvres which may last for a fortnight.

So you see he does get a certain amount of training in the handling of troops; but the whole of this training is vitiated by two things. First of all, the country in which the work is done is so absolutely familiar to the general himself and to every officer and man in his command, that the element of surprise is entirely wanting in every scheme. If the attack be in a certain direction, everyone knows exactly where the enemy will be posted, precisely where his guns will be, on which flank his cavalry will

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show themselves, and by what road he intends to retreat. Again, familiarity with the ground deprives the officer in command of acquiring that most valuable military gift, the power of quickly "reading" a strange country, and being able to decide rapidly on its strong and weak points tactically considered. Moreover, where the ground is absolutely familiar, it is quite unnecessary to waste time in reconnaissance, consequently reconnaissance is neglected by all ranks; and when we have to trust to reconnaissance or perish, as in the present war, why we perish, that's all.

Again, at Aldershot, and indeed in every military training ground which we possess out of India, the whole training of both officers and men, from the highest to the lowest, is carried on with an entire disregard of service conditions. Every field-day

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is limited, on the one hand, by the men's breakfast, on the other, by their dinner - hour. Battles are rushed through in order that the men may get back to their dinners, and that the officers may catch the evening train to town in time to dine at their clubs or visit the theatres.

Even when the troops are out on manœuvres things are not much better. For Aldershot, standing camps are substituted, that is all. The dinner-hour holds its harmful sway ; outposts are never put out, except possibly on one occasion, to allow of the practice of that most pernicious enterprise, a night attack, which has already cost us dear enough in this war. Neither general nor staff officers get any practice whatever in those most important duties, the arranging of bivouacs or cantonments for their troops in the proximity

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of the battlefield, or the provisioning of their men in fresh camping grounds.

The result is easy to see in the present campaign. Though that branch of the service known as the Army Service Corps has throughout done its work admirably, and has always had supplies wherever the generals required them to be, yet we see that on many most important occasions our men have had to go into action on empty stomachs. I believe that when a man fights on an empty stomach and is so unfortunate to be shot through the intestines, the wound is less likely to prove fatal; the empty stomach has no other military advantage that I am aware of.

Again, neither the generals nor their staffs are ever permitted to get any practice in attempting the solution of that most difficult and important problem, the supply of ammunition to

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troops engaged. Consequently, we see in this absent-minded war that on more than one occasion our troops are seriously embarrassed by the failure of their ammunition supply, a factor which, as we know, was not without its influence on the loss of Colonel Long's guns at Colenso. Whereas, on service, troops going into action will carry at least one hundred and fifty rounds per man in their pouches, on the average field-day we find that fifteen rounds per man are issued, and five of these precious cartridges are carried on the mules! Could anything be more farcical? Would it be possible to find a better example of losing a ship for the sake of a pennyworth of tar?

But if the general employed at Aldershot finds it impossible to get practice in the most important duties of his profession, how much worse off

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is the officer appointed to the command of one of the districts into which the United Kingdom is divided! At the headquarters of his district may be two or three battalions, more likely two than three, very possibly only one. He may have a battery or two of artillery somewhere in his command; it is equally likely that he may not. A few more infantry battalions, and possibly a cavalry regiment or two, may be scattered in isolated stations throughout his district; but it is a thousand to one against his ever being permitted to assemble and drill or exercise these troops in combined operations of the three arms. The whole of his time is taken up in office work of the most uninteresting description. Nothing comes his way but matters of the merest routine. Any military staff clerk of average intelligence could

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"run" nine districts out of ten without the slightest difficulty; in fact, in the large majority of cases the districts into which the United Kingdom is divided are "run" by clerks, and the General Officer Commanding is merely a cipher kept at the headquarters for the purpose of signing documents.

The only actual military duties he performs are those of inspection of the troops in his command, inspections which teach him nothing, and from which he can learn little or nothing of the actual efficiency of the troops, owing to the unpractical conditions under which they are carried out. Instead of descending unexpectedly on a battalion, seeing it on parade, testing the officers in their drill and knowledge of their duties, by which procedure something might be learnt of the state of the corps, the General

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Officer Commanding gives ample warning of his coming, so that elaborate preparations may be made to receive him, and all weak points or shortcomings glossed over for the occasion. Before an inspection there is always a feverish activity, known in the service as "inspection fever," in every regiment. Everybody works at high pressure for two or three weeks, till the fuss culminates in the inspection itself, an ordeal which usually lasts a couple of days. Once this is over as many officers as can manage it race away on leave, and the corps relapses into its usual lethargic state till the approach of the next annual inspection wakes everyone from their torpor.

Amongst other duties which fall to the lot of the General Officer Commanding is that of reporting confidentially on every officer in his command.

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In the case of regimental officers, he is absolutely in the hands of regimental commanding officers, and many a career is blighted by a stab in the dark administered in this manner through the agency of these infernal, un-English, confidential reports. Some men are adepts at damning with faint praise, and as the general is bound to follow the lead of commanding officers in the case of junior officers probably not even known to him by sight, very many officers find themselves under a cloud for the whole of their career, without for a moment suspecting the cause thereof.

This is a digression. Let us return to the training of our generals for war. I am afraid we shall have to examine their daily life with a microscope to find any trace of any training of this kind. Even then I don't imagine we would find very much

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likely to be useful. Generals, as a rule, are elderly men, and when the average man becomes elderly he does not hanker after violent exercise or long hours in the saddle. He puts on flesh, as a rule; he prefers the office chair to the saddle, the club smoking-room to the outpost line. Who can blame him? Who can say that under similar circumstances his tastes and inclinations would not lie in the same direction? But all the same these worthy old gentlemen are not the stuff of which great commanders are made, nor is the system on which our generals are educated calculated to produce either great commanders or original thinkers.

We do occasionally discover a soldier with a genius for war. Such a one is Lord Roberts, such another is Kitchener, and Baden-Powell. Look at the career of these men.

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What has it in common with the careers of the average British general? Nothing. All of them have been forced, while young men, to act upon their own responsibility; they have by circumstances been freed from the paralysing fetters of red tape; they have defied the traditions of the War Office, and are in consequence all three of them in exceedingly bad odour in that shrine of mediocrity and incompetence.

When Lord Roberts was appointed to the command in South Africa, it is well known that the War Office was not consulted; it may not be equally well known that they threw every possible obstacle in the way of his selecting the staff to accompany him. In one instance at least they succeeded. None of the three officers whose names I have just mentioned, and who are undoubtedly the leading

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military figures of the day, have ever passed the sacred portals of the Staff College. Neither have Sir George White, Major-General French, Major-General Clements, Major-General MacDonald, nor Colonel Kekewich, all officers who have in varying degrees done good service in this war. In fact, not a single Staff College graduate has done anything at all remarkable for brilliancy in the whole course of the campaign, which is rather a remarkable result, considering that Staff College men get the preference in all appointments, and that the College has been in existence for something like forty years.

Enough for the present of our general officers. They are without exception men whose gallantry and whose patriotism is beyond question; that they are not great commanders,

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that they are not men whom the country can rely upon in her dark hour, is not their fault but that of the rotten system which for years has paralysed and rendered corrupt the whole fabric of our army.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAINING OF THE SOLDIER

His Physical Training—His Marching Training—
How he is made a Marksman—How he is
taught his Duties in the Field—The System
Criticised—Some Suggestions.

IN this chapter I propose to give an outline sketch of the training which our private soldiers and non-commissioned officers receive to fit them for their duties in the day of battle.

Everyone knows what the average recruit is like : he is, as a rule, a lad of eighteen years of age or thereabouts—nominally—for it is by no means unusual for boys of sixteen or even less to be accepted as recruits,

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if, in the opinion of the examining medical officer, they are equal in physical development to the ordinary young man of eighteen years of age. The standard is not a high one, physically, but it is continually being varied as recruiting fluctuates. In seasons when recruits are coming forward briskly, the tendency is to raise the standard of height and chest measurement; when trade improves and recruiting consequently falls off,—for the army is unfortunately usually regarded as the last resource by the unemployed,—the standard is generally lowered, and even men who fail to reach the required measurements are accepted as “specials.” The physical conditions that recruits for the infantry of the line have to fulfil are as follows: They must be not less than 5 ft. 3½ in. in height, and must have a minimum chest measurement of 33 in. If over

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5 ft. 3½ in., but under 5 ft. 7 in., their chest measurement must reach 34 in.; if over 5 ft. 7 in., they must measure not less than 35 in. round the chest. The minimum weight for all recruits is 115 lb.

These do not seem very severe physical tests for a man who wishes to enroll himself among the fighting forces of the Empire, but, as I have said, many recruits are accepted who fail to reach even this moderate standard. As for the age test, as I have said, it is merely a farce. No steps whatever are taken to verify the statements of the would-be recruit as to his age, and I distinctly remember a case where a recruit recently attested was released on his mother being summoned by the local School Board inspector on account of his absence from school; the boy was in fact only fourteen years of age.

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Of late we have seen very great improvements in the system on which the young soldier is trained, so far as his purely physical training is concerned; an improvement which all must recognise is chiefly due to the efforts of Colonel Fox, who, as inspector of gymnasia, introduced the system of scientific physical training now in force at all the depôts and in all our regiments. For the first three months the recruit is kept hard at work at gymnastics, a speciality being made of what is known as free gymnastics, or exercises which can be conducted on the barrack square or anywhere else, and for which no apparatus is required. As the food of the young soldier has also been very much improved of late, and the conditions under which he lives are regulated with much more regard to sanitary considerations than used to

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be the case, the average recruit, after three months' dépôt service, is generally a very well-developed animal indeed, even the "specials" having increased in weight and measurements in a perfectly astonishing manner.

It must be confessed that this excessive gymnastic training is not always very popular. I remember a case where a recruit deserted, and on being brought back and asked his reasons for his misconduct, confessed that he did not like the work. "He had enlisted," he said, "to become a soldier, not a bally acrobat"; however, as he explained that he had made his escape by climbing over the roof of the gymnasium, it was clear that there were after all certain advantages in being a "bally acrobat." But the men who dislike this training are not the best recruits, being usually men who are not by their tempera-

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ment suited for military service, so I would not for a moment alter the system of gymnastic training from any regard for their susceptibilities.

So far all has been good ; it is only when we proceed to make a *soldier* of the man, now strong, active, and physically sound, that we come hopelessly to grief. Naturally the most important point for a soldier, besides being able to march and to carry his equipment, is to be an expert shot. We have seen how the soldier is made an athlete ; now let us see how he is taught to march and to shoot.

If he join his regiment during the early winter months, his training in marching will precede his training in shooting. It will consist in bi-weekly marches of some twelve to fourteen miles in length, during the first of which he will be permitted to march light, probably merely carrying his

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rifle, but on which he will gradually find his load increased till at the end of the winter he finds himself able to comfortably carry his full kit without any excessive fatigue. But there his training stops, so far as marching is concerned. Our authorities forget what every stud groom could tell them, that condition is cumulative, and that it is unwise to let a man get soft and out of condition for half the year. No; from sheer absent-mindedness those responsible for the training of our soldiers say, "Oh, now he can march, he must learn something else. He has learnt to march. That is quite sufficient"; so we see the recruit next sent to musketry, and then to his ordinary duty of guards and a couple of parades a week, without any exercise to keep up his marching powers; with the result that if taken for manœuvres in hot summer weather

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he is terribly distressed for some days, and only really recovers his condition by the time the manœuvres are over, and he is sent back to barracks to run to seed again. So much for his marching training.

Now for his musketry. As a recruit, he is taught the parts of his rifle, and the theory of musketry, the latter being gabbled to him parrot-wise by the assistant - adjutant, a youngster fresh from Hythe, who makes diagrams quite meaningless to the recruit on the blackboard, and spouts out the lectures word for word as they are to be found in the red-book. He is also taught aiming drill; adjusting his sights and directing his aim from a tripod rest on a target at the other end of the barrack square. When he has got his aim he steps to one side and the instructor looks along his sights and points out

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any errors. I find no fault with this part of his instruction, except that more pains should be taken to interest the recruit in the theory of musketry, and no efforts should be spared to educate his intelligence and to teach him to think for himself.

However, once he has passed out of the hands of the assistant-adjutant he will not be much more troubled with the theory of musketry. He also learns "judging distance," or rather, he is told what "judging distance" means, and is given a few, very few, opportunities for making himself expert at it. Considering that accurate rifle shooting depends to an enormous extent on the correct estimating of the distance separating the firer from his target, it is perfectly inexplicable to me that so little pains is taken to give the soldier practice in this most necessary exercise. A recruit has

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only to do six judging distance practices in his course, and as nothing whatever depends on his proficiency in the exercise, he very frequently is as hopelessly incapable of estimating a range when he has finished his course as he was on the day he commenced it.

He now commences his course of musketry proper, having usually received some preliminary instruction in firing with blank cartridge and with the miniature or Morris tube cartridge, to prepare him in some measure for the noise of the explosion and the shock of firing. In his recruit's course he fires 189 rounds, commencing at a target 6 feet square and only 200 yards off. He fires both lying down, kneeling, and standing, but only 28 rounds out of his whole course are fired in the latter position. With his first 77 rounds he must make 175 points out

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of a possible 308, or he will be put back and made to begin again. This standard is clearly not a high one, and most men with decent eyesight have no difficulty in satisfying the requirements of the musketry authorities. In his first 77 rounds he has not fired at a greater distance than 400 yards, but he now goes farther from the target, till he concludes his deliberate individual firing with 7 rounds at 800 yards, his target at this distance being 6 feet high and 8 feet long, painted white, and with a black bull's-eye 3 feet in diameter. He now fires 28 rounds "rapid individual" at 200 and 500 yards, having to fire 7 rounds from his magazine within a minute, and when he has finished this he concludes his course by firing 63 rounds in sectional practices, both in volley and independent firing. When he has accomplished this he has become a

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trained recruit, and now nothing remains for him but to fire his trained soldier's course, when he becomes that finished article — the fully trained British linesman.

I think few people will deny that the amount of ammunition allotted to the recruit is absurdly inadequate, if the authorities have any serious intention of really making our soldiers efficient shots. It is much easier to shoot fairly well with a gun than with a rifle, but who would think he had learnt more than the A B C of shooting till he had fired certainly over a thousand cartridges? Yet the War Office and their absent-minded, addle-headed advisers think that they can make an ignorant lad into a rifleman by allowing him to fire 189 rounds as a recruit, and afterwards 200 rounds a year for the rest of his service. Supposing that a man serves for seven

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years, I don't suppose that in the whole of that time he will, under ordinary circumstances, fire 2000 rounds, and probably the whole of the time which he spends on the rifle range during that period would be under a week, deducting the time which he has spent loafing about on the range while other men have been firing. Is this not ridiculous?

Again, the targets at which a soldier is exercised do not bear the slightest resemblance to anything he will be required to hit in war time. Instead of a constantly moving fringe of dun-coloured dots, the soldier is shown a large white screen with a black bull's-eye conveniently painted in the centre of it. The result is that when our men are led into action there is the most appalling waste of ammunition; and their extraordinary dash and gallantry are in great measure wasted.

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But even with the 200 rounds allotted annually for practice to the trained soldier, a certain amount of good could be done if the rounds were sensibly expended. But out of this 200 rounds only 42 are allowed for individual practice, 40 may be expended at the discretion of his captain, and 41 as may be thought best by his commanding officer. The captain may have some of the rounds, concerning the disposal of which he has a say, used in individual practices, including a few rounds at the moving or disappearing target ; but the rounds at the disposal of the commanding officer are, as a rule, used for field firing, which under present conditions I can only look upon as an absolute waste of time, and not in the least likely to improve the shooting of any individual.

Our musketry authorities have of

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late become perfectly mad on the subject of collective firing, quite regardless of the fact that modern conditions of warfare entirely favour the individual marksman as opposed to the section. It is necessary that men in the firing line should be extended at considerable distances, especially if engaged with a foe who has any idea of how to use his rifle. No section commander can possibly exercise an effective control over the fire of men extended at several paces interval; very much better results will be obtained by educated and skilful shots, each firing as he sees an opportunity for doing so with effect.

Where the section has to wait for the orders of their commander for each volley, the fleeting opportunity has generally vanished before the section are all at the "present"; and it is only by instantly seizing opportunities of

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inflicting loss on your enemy, as they present themselves, that it is possible either to check his advance or to drive him from his entrenchments. This seems to me absolutely unanswerable, yet we see daily more and more stress being laid on crisp volleys, and less and less time or ammunition allowed for the practice of individual firing. The system is entirely indefensible, but the authorities are so complacent and so self-satisfied, in spite of the rude shock their vanity has received in this war, that unless public opinion be educated and so induced to insist upon modern methods being adopted in the training of our troops, we are more likely to go from bad to worse than to improve.

Another weak point in our absent-minded musketry training is that no real inducements are offered to any soldier to take pains to improve his shooting. I have already referred to

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the prize system, which is quite ineffective. The sums awarded as prizes are too small, not that I would advocate larger sums, for I think the system of money prizes is all wrong, and everyone has a share in the beer purchased with them whether he is the best or the worst shot in the company.

To improve the shooting of the army, the first thing to be done is to allow just ten times as much ammunition as is now issued to each man, for practice in individual practices ; to substitute small moving targets for the large white fixed targets now in use ; to confine collective practices to long-range volleys, that is to say volleys at 800 yards and upwards ; to make men fire half their allotted rounds at unknown distances, and to train men with great care in the important art of judging distance. To render the men keen and anxious to make themselves

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fine shots, I should reduce the fixed daily pay by about one-half, and should raise the maximum which could be drawn by a private soldier—irrespective of good conduct pay—to 1s. 6d. per diem, the amount to be actually drawn by each man depending entirely on his skill with his rifle. At least three afternoons in the week at every station—and troops should be removed from all stations without ample and convenient range accommodation—should be set aside for private practice, a roster for duty in the markers' butts being kept through the whole battalion. The men should be permitted to buy practice ammunition at cost price, or below it if possible (perhaps the canteen profits might be advantageously used here); and finally, *each man should have his rifle fitted with a stock of suitable bend and length.*

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Just think what an army we should have if these recommendations could be carried out. We should have an army of experts, of men who could walk through any of the great conscript armies of the Continent as easily as an express train would go through a lawn-tennis net. Our army would be irresistible, invincible, and worthy of the great Empire under whose banner it fights. We have the most magnificent raw material in the world from which to make our soldiers, yet we fail to utilise it as we might, entirely through the absent-mindedness, wrong-headedness, and stupidity of the officials entrusted with the training of our troops.

But apart from musketry, it is quite worth while examining how our soldiers are educated for war. Every man has to do a certain number of

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drills, of course ; drill is a necessity, as without it it would be impossible to handle troops without confusion on the field of battle, but in our service I fear that drill is regarded too much as the end and not only as the means, and weary hours are annually wasted at close order drill which might be very much better employed on the rifle range, or on the manœuvre ground. Our men get twice too much drill in close order, and not half enough drill in extended order, which latter is now more essential than ever, as no troops can move under fire and survive unless widely extended.

However, the soldier gets practically no instruction in drill in extended order, with the exception of a few cut and dried drills for practising the regimental attack, till he goes to military or field training with his company. A man ought to learn a

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great deal which will be useful to him in his field-training course; he does, as a rule, pick up a smattering of military knowledge, but the value of the course is vitiated by two considerations: in the first place, it is too short, only lasting for twenty working days, and in the second place the captain, in whose hands the course of instruction rests, is frequently himself more or less ignorant of the subjects in which he is supposed to instruct his men.

The course is a ridiculous burlesque of what such a course should be. In the first place, there is very little which is more important to the soldier, whatever his rank, than a thorough knowledge of the whole duty of outposts, including posting, selection of picket and sentry line, attack and defence, patrolling, reconnoitring, etc., yet only three days in

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the year are allotted to this important subject in the field-training course. At Aldershot the soldier will probably get some more practice in outpost duty with his battalion, but on ground which is so familiar to him that the instruction loses half its value ; but if quartered elsewhere it is extremely doubtful if he will ever be placed on outpost duty once he has done three days with his company. And the same limited time is allotted to every other useful branch of the soldier's education, with the result that our non-commissioned officers and men are never given the opportunities in time of peace of acquiring more than the veriest smattering of the serious duties of their profession. The soldier spends more time in the year on sentry-go at the barrack gate, which teaches him nothing but to hate the service, than in all the more

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important duties of his profession put together, including musketry itself. Can anything be more shameful, more absurd, or more ridiculous than this?

Yet we were surprised that ignorant farmers like the Boers were able for so long to successfully oppose our regular troops. Ignorant farmers as they were, I tell you that they knew more of war in its grim reality than all our regulars put together, including the men who had fought so well in the Tirah campaign and in the Soudan. These ignorant farmers had been at war with nature and the wilderness all their lives. They could read the skies and the sounds and signs of the veldt, a sealed book to our town-bred Tommies. They fought to slay, not to display their heroism; they had no illusions about the disgrace of seeking cover, an illusion which I am glad to

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see has been killed in our service by Boer bullets. They fought to kill, not to be killed, and, carefully hidden, lost no opportunity of shooting down our poor, plucky, blundering Tommies, led by officers as gallant, as devoted, as self-sacrificing as any the world has ever seen, but fatally ignorant of the meaning of modern warfare, waged with smokeless powder, long-range rifles, and a crafty enemy.

Fortunately for us, the Boer has lost much of his old deadly skill with the rifle. Game is becoming scarce in the Transvaal; instead of riding out with rifle in hand to secure his dinner, the modern Boer butchers it on his farmstead; but even though this deadly skill has left him, think of how his instinctive knowledge of the ground, his talent for skirmishing and for taking advantage of cover, enabled him to keep us at bay for months, and

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very nearly made us a laughing-stock and a byword in Europe. Had our men spent as much time in the last five years in learning to shoot as they have spent in pipe-claying their straps, the end of this war would have come very much more quickly, and instead of having cost us over sixty millions as it has already, we should probably have finished the job for ten. The old proverb of "A stitch in time saves nine" applies with peculiar force to the training of the soldier. For every pound the nation spends on the peace training of her army, she will save ten in the day of battle.

The absent-minded War Office has of late devoted as much of its attention as could be spared from the congenial task of minuting Inter-Departmental letters on trivialities, to the question of organisation and mobilisation, to the neglect of the equally important

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details connected with the training of the officers and men. The farce of manœuvres satisfied the public; the army itself was satisfied with anything; at any rate the voice of the army is always the last thing heeded, either by the nation or the War Office, so that it does not much matter what the army had to say about the matter. That the last manœuvres were a farce was practically admitted by no less a person than the Commander-in-Chief in his report. He says on p. 6. Report on Salisbury Plain Manœuvres: "It would be optimistic to say that the fullest tactical value was obtained from each day's operations. Long days and nights out of bed seriously affect the recruiting of a voluntary army, and we cannot afford to ignore this fact. To work our men during manœuvres as is often done abroad, would necessi-

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tate a far greater pressure upon our young soldiers than those responsible for the recruiting of our army can venture to impose, during peace, upon the rank and file."

I take it that this can mean nothing else than that we pay our men so badly, or we offer such small inducements to recruits to join the army, that we cannot seriously attempt to teach them their business, as it should be taught them, for fear that possible recruits, weighing the work to be done with the advantages to be gained, would decide that the game was not worth the candle. Therefore we deliberately choose to allow our troops to remain inefficient in preference to facing the alternative and making the service more attractive.

Precisely the same argument applies to the officers. So long as we give our officers an easy time, and refrain

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from working them too hard, or making them take their profession seriously, we can count upon a practically unlimited supply of young men of means who do not mind spending their money in return for the privilege of wearing Her Majesty's uniform. But if we make these officers work seriously at their profession, without making their pay sufficient to support them, we shall quickly dry up the source from which we can now draw our officers. I can find no other meaning for Lord Wolseley's words. Considering that the manœuvres only last a fortnight or so at the outside, I believe that his fears are quite without foundation, and men would not mind being really worked hard for a bit if they were fairly treated in their claims for compensation for worn-out and damaged clothing and shoe-leather. To have to work hard on manœuvres

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and then to have to pay the bill in the form of repairs to boots and clothes, is what gets up the back both of Tommy and of his officer as well.

CHAPTER V

THE DESPATCHES OF THE GENERALS

Sir George White, Talana Hill, and Ladysmith—
The Intelligence Department—Willow Grange
—Night Attacks Criticised—Lord Methuen's
Despatches—General Gatacre Criticised—Sir
Redvers Buller and Colenso—The Reasons
for our Reverses—How to Avoid them in
future.

IN this chapter I propose to briefly discuss the Official Despatches sent home from South Africa by Lord Roberts and Sir Redvers Buller, with the object of pointing out to my readers the indications to be found in these documents of the wrong principles on which our leaders have been trained, and to which all the

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reverses of this campaign are distinctly to be traced.

The first despatch is from Sir George White, and deals with the reasons which led to our occupation and subsequent evacuation of Glencoe and Dundee. This evacuation, following as it did on a tactical victory, won with the greatest gallantry by the British at Talana Hill, was necessitated by the exposed position of the small British force which had been thrust forward into the very jaws of the superior Boer armies. It is not pleasant to say anything which may be taken as reflecting on the character of a fallen soldier, more especially when that soldier fell in the hour of victory when gallantly leading his men against the enemy, but it would be absurd to deny that the action of Talana Hill and the subsequent withdrawal on Ladysmith were necessitated by the action taken

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by General Symons in consequence of the very erroneous estimate he had formed of the Boer strength, and also in consequence of the strong representations made by Sir Hely Hutchinson as to the evil political results which would follow on an abandonment of Northern Natal to the enemy.

The only excuses which can be made for General Sir William Penn Symons are that it is a traditional British failing to underrate one's adversary, and that the Intelligence Department is to be blamed for not placing at his disposal accurate information as to the Boer strength and probable movements.

General Symons had only been a few months in Natal. It was impossible for him in that short time to have closely studied for himself the military organisation and the strength

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for war of the Boers. He had to rely on the information given to him by junior officers on the spot, doubtless tempered by that tendency to underrate an opponent which I have already alluded to as a British characteristic. For the military error committed, the Staff College, as represented by our Intelligence Department, must be held primarily responsible. Yet the Intelligence Department has to contend with considerable difficulties which it would be unfair to overlook. We are one of the wealthiest nations in the world, probably the wealthiest, yet we fetter the action of the Intelligence Department of the army, on the efficiency of which the fate of the Empire itself may conceivably depend, by limiting the expenditure of secret service money to a ridiculously small sum, smaller probably than the amount

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expended for such services by the little kingdom of Roumania.

If the Intelligence Department be starved for want of funds, how can we expect it to be in possession of reliable information as to the secret designs of our possible enemies? Yet early knowledge of such designs would in the present war have saved us millions. It is probable that a great daily paper like the *Times* spends more than the British Empire on what is practically secret service. It has been said that every man has his price; there cannot be the slightest doubt that a judicious expenditure in the proper quarter would have placed us in possession of every detail of the Boer forces and armaments, yet we see that during this war we have met with surprise after surprise through the neglect of this very obvious means of obtaining information.

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Then as to the political arguments used by the Governor of Natal ; it ought to have been perfectly plain to that gentleman that the evacuation of a portion of our territory, in accordance with a prearranged design, would be much less harmful to our prestige than a hasty retreat to avoid capture by a pursuing enemy. This would have occurred to most men ; it does not appear to have occurred to Sir Hely Hutchinson. A glance at the map should have convinced him that it was rash in the extreme to place a handful of British troops in a salient position, where they had the initial disadvantage of having the enemy's territory on three sides of them, and a population of doubtful loyalty in their rear, where, moreover, their continued existence depended on their retention of a long line of railway running throughout its length within

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easy striking distance of the hostile frontier.

Enough, however, of this catastrophe; let us be thankful that our retreat from a position in which we ought never to have been placed was accomplished without disaster, a result which was chiefly due to the guidance of the veteran Colonel Dartnell, a warrior who has grown grey in Her Majesty's service, but who, being a "colonial," was not even mentioned in despatches or given the smallest official thanks for his great services. It is difficult to understand the combination of political motives which first risks a disaster in deference to colonial sentiment, and then, when, thanks to the exertions of a colonial officer, that disaster is avoided, omits to render that officer the smallest acknowledgment for his services.

The rest of Sir George White's

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despatch is taken up with the actions at Elandslaagte and Rietfontein. Both, though tactically fought on the offensive, were strategically defensive actions, and were in the highest degree successful, though useless in averting or even in effectively delaying the investment of Ladysmith by the superior forces which were then at the disposal of our enemies.

The next despatch deals with the action of Willow Grange, fought on the night of the 22nd November by a small force under Major-General Hildyard, in order to capture some Boer artillery who were well posted on a high kopje from which they were able to annoy our troops. Now a night attack, or a march by night culminating in an attack at dawn, is one of the most risky operations of war. Success is only possible when the country has been closely reconnoitred

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beforehand, both by day and night, a reconnaissance which should be made personally by the staff officers deputed to lead the column. Local guides should never be employed, except in order to assist the staff by their advice and local knowledge. The safety of the column, moreover, should never be entrusted entirely to them.

For a night attack of this nature to succeed, it must also be a surprise. If the enemy gets the smallest hint as to what he may expect, there is very little chance of achieving any important results, and a very good chance of a disastrous failure. It is unfortunate for us that night attacks received a sort of official sanction by the success of the night march on the eve of Tel-el-Kebir. On that occasion a large British force was led across a perfectly open country on a clear starlight night to within striking

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distance of a foe notoriously careless about his outpost service. The attack succeeded, though it was within an ace of failing disastrously, as, the central brigade having checked its pace, the flank brigades swung round towards each other, not noticing in the darkness whither they were leading, with the result that they were just about to fire into each other when most fortunately the mistake was discovered. It would naturally be thought that when an attack, carried out, as that one was, under the most favourable circumstances possible, so narrowly escaped entire shipwreck, official countenance would not be extended to such operations in the future.

But the very opposite has been the case. After Tel-el-Kebir the British army went mad about night attacks. At every station officers and men

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used to be sent wandering about the country in the dark with compasses prepared with luminous paint, and the most absurd tales are rife in every garrison of the ludicrous manner in which most of these operations ended.

It might have been imagined that when the authorities found that troops could not be confidently relied on to concentrate by night at given points, even within the neighbourhood of their own stations, working over ground which should have been perfectly familiar to them, the official belief in the utility of night operations would have received a check ; but we shall find that the reverse was the case, though no important success, but two serious disasters, attended their employment in South Africa.

But to return to General Hildyard. It being essential that no hints should

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be given to the Boers of the operation we were contemplating, our infantry were moved out to a preparatory position on the afternoon of the 22nd, and were seen and fired upon by the very guns which we were about to surprise. As General Hildyard naïvely states, "This led to the enemy being more alert than usual." The net result of the whole operation, which has been in many quarters regarded as quite an important victory for us, was that the Boers removed their guns, that we had to abandon the position from which our assaulting columns had driven some hundred and fifty Boers, and that in our retirement we lost many officers and men. The guide to whose loyalty the safety of the assailants had been entrusted, and who fortunately proved trustworthy, was, I regret to say, shot in the advance. I must admit that I

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can see nothing in this operation on which we can plume ourselves in the smallest degree, if I except the great gallantry shown as usual by all our officers and men.

We now come to Lord Methuen's despatches. It is regrettable that we are not told the reasons which led to the sending of a force very imperfectly supplied with mounted troops (though it was well known that mounted troops were absolutely necessary to obtain any important successes against the Boers, who are themselves all mounted), in order ostensibly to relieve a town which, as we now know, held out without difficulty for over three months longer. When we heard in this country that Lord Methuen was taking his division up north to relieve Kimberley, an operation which would clearly involve a good deal of stiff fighting, we

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naturally imagined that Kimberley must be in the greatest straits, and that its capture was imminent if not quickly relieved. As a matter of fact, its capture was not imminent, and the sole explanation of the move is to be found in the impassioned appeals which we are told Mr. Cecil Rhodes, who found his surroundings not at all to his taste, kept addressing to the authorities to free him from the clutches of the Boers.

There is another point on which information would be very desirable. I should like to hear why, when the despatch of this column had been decided on, Lord Methuen permitted the fullest accounts as to his strength and the direction and objective of his march to be wired home by the press correspondents. Lord Methuen had absolute control of the wires; why did he make such bad use of it?

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The consequence of this neglect is to be found in the elaborate entrenchments at Belmont, the Modder, and Magersfontein, which the Boers were given ample time to prepare in order to oppose our march.

We have been told that Lord Methuen was obliged to march along the railway owing to the want of efficient transport. We have lately seen Lord Roberts march a force five times as strong, more than a hundred miles away from the railway, without any failures of his transport. The fact is that Lord Roberts understood both the difficulties in his way and the manner in which they could be overcome. Lord Methuen saw the difficulties, but was unable to grapple with them. To reduce his transport, he ordered all tents and baggage, except the most absolute necessities, to be left behind, he himself only

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taking a blanket for a coverlet at night, an example which he desired his officers to follow. He, however, took the invariable precaution of supplementing his blanket by a roof, a wise precaution which was not possible for his subordinates.

However, he advanced; he let everyone know where he was going, and why, and he tied himself in his advance to the railway. The defensive attitude which he adopted in his despatches shows that he was aware of the nature of the criticisms which his "bull-dog" tactics would evoke. He stated that it was impossible to attack the Boers in flank or to turn their positions, because in fifteen minutes they could meet you on a new front, and so convert every flank attack into a frontal attack. He omitted to mention, an omission which I have much pleasure in sup-

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plying, that the Boers could not make trenches in fifteen minutes, and that a Boer in a trench is a very much more formidable enemy than a Boer out of a trench, as he was to learn to his cost later on. However, at Belmont, his first action, the attack, which was preceded by a night march, succeeded. Our troops showed the most astonishing dash, as usual, and drove the enemy from the kopjes, suffering pretty severely in doing so. The cavalry, having been on the march all night and employed in safeguarding our flanks all day, were, to Lord Methuen's indignant surprise, unable to complete the rout by charging the retreating enemy. For the same reason the guns were unable to shell the Boers as they fled. Consequently the fruits of the gallantry of our soldiers were in great measure lost.

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Precisely the same is observable at Enslin, Lord Methuen's next action. The position appears to have been insufficiently reconnoitred,—according to the Aldershot model,—with the result that what was intended for a flank attack proved to be a frontal attack, and costly in proportion. The bulk of the losses were incurred by the naval brigade. It is impossible to pass over without comment the policy which assigned to the naval brigade the duty of storming a kopje, while battalions of regular infantry were held in reserve. The naval gunner is one of the most valuable assets of the Empire, yet we see him wasted in an action like this, an action which could have been equally well performed by an infantry battalion, and for which neither the training nor the experience of the naval seaman at all fits him. Lord Methuen's excuse is,

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I believe, that the sailors wanted a chance of distinguishing themselves, so he gave them the chance, and lost half of them.

Enslin was another victory on the same lines as Belmont. At home people were beginning to say that a few more such victories would leave us without an army.

Lord Methuen's next victory, which he described in inflated language as one of the most hardly contested engagements in the annals of the British army, took place on the banks of the Modder, and is another example of the entire absence of any intelligent reconnaissance of the enemy's position, which is explained with simplicity by Lord Methuen in the remark that "he didn't know the enemy were there!" At any rate he assumed that the village on the Modder was not held; he marched his troops off with-

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out their breakfasts, blundered straight into the centre of a position prepared with the most elaborate care, and was only saved from a disastrous defeat by the extraordinary courage and tenacity of his troops. Lord Methuen himself showed the utmost gallantry in this action, in which he was wounded, a wound to which he refers in the following extraordinary language :—" I am glad to have been slightly wounded, because in no other way could I have learnt the care taken of the wounded, and there was nothing officer or private soldier required that was not provided at once, and the medical officers never tired in their endeavour to alleviate suffering." I have hitherto supposed that a general would be able to ascertain with what measure of efficiency his hospital service was managed, without having to experiment *in corpore*

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vili; in any case I do not see how a general could infer simply from the attention with which he was treated that the humblest soldiers in his army received the same amount of care. It is a curious episode.

When night fell on the hotly contested action of the Modder River, our troops had gained but little advantage, with the exception that we had won a foothold on the enemy's bank, a success which was so little due to our superior generalship, that our guns were continuing to fire on our own men on the north bank till means were found to apprise them of the situation. The general blundered into a snare; the soldier pulled him out.

As we all know, the battle of the Modder was soon followed by the disastrous battle of Magersfontein. It will not be easy to find more melan-

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choly reading than is furnished by Lord Methuen's despatch dealing with that action.

The first point which will attract attention about this remarkable document is, that though the action was fought on the morning of the 11th December, the despatch describing it bears the date of the 15th February! It has been explained in the House of Commons that Lord Methuen furnished a document purporting to be a despatch at an earlier date, but that it was returned to him because of its being drawn up in an incorrect form, the actual reports of subordinates being attached, whereas a consecutive narrative should have been written from them by the commanding officer himself,—in this case Lord Methuen. So the documents were returned to South Africa to be recast; hence the delay.

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Now this explanation in itself requires a good deal of explanation. It is somewhat of an eye-opener to learn that the requirements of red-tape can only be satisfied by the form in which the most important documents are cast. Here was an official excuse for a costly and disastrous blunder, a document for which half the civilised world was waiting with anxiety and curiosity, which had to be returned to the writer, a course involving a delay of over two months and a journey of over 14,000 miles, because it was not drawn up in the form which commended itself to the fastidious taste of the Commander-in-Chief. Who can believe this, or who, believing this, is not the more confirmed in a desire to infuse some common sense and vigour into a department in which such follies are possible?

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But there is more food for reflection in the despatch itself.

To commence with, Lord Methuen's explanations as to the reasons which made the battle inevitable show a singular contempt for the judgment of his readers. He tells us that the direct route by the railway was out of the question, owing to the presence of the enemy, strongly entrenched, on the kopjes on each side of it, and also to there not being "sufficient water by that route to Kimberley." How ridiculous this latter reason is, may be judged from the fact that the distance is little over twenty miles, and that Lord Methuen's transport was able, as he himself admits further on, to carry five days' rations for his whole force. The presence of the enemy in their entrenchments was the real reason and the sole reason; Lord Methuen's object in dragging in the

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entirely irrelevant matter of water-supply is inexplicable.

He then proceeds to state the considerations which finally led him to decide on the night attack, destined to end so disastrously, and in the course of these explanations he incidentally mentions that the enemy were 16,000 strong. Now, it is obvious that this estimate does not include the besiegers of Kimberley, who were unable to reduce their strength below a certain minimum at any time, and, as we all know now, the estimate is a shockingly exaggerated one. Lord Methuen should have had the candour to explain that he had no real data of any value on which a reliable estimate of the enemy's strength could be formed; instead of this, he places their numbers at a fancy figure in order to excuse his own defeat. However, the fact re-

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mains that he did decide, and on the whole wisely, to attack the Magersfontein position, so soon as his last reinforcements had arrived ; and there is now very little doubt in the minds of men who were there, that if the attack had been conducted in a judicious manner, it would have had a very good chance of success.

Let us see how Lord Methuen failed. Having determined to surprise his enemy by a night attack,—or rather by an attack at dawn, delivered after a night march had placed his assaulting troops close in front of the Boers' trenches,—he proceeded to put his enemy on their guard by a vigorous bombardment for two hours on the evening preceding the assault, expecting, for some extraordinary reason, that the moral effect of this bombardment would seriously weaken the defence. In his own words :

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"Judging from the moral effect produced by the guns in my three previous actions, and the additional anticipated effects of lyddite, I expected great destruction of life in the trenches, and a considerable demoralising effect on the enemy's nerves, thereby indirectly assisting the attack at daybreak."

It is to me absolutely incomprehensible that Lord Methuen could anticipate any great moral effect from so short a bombardment, especially in view of the *very small* effect produced by the guns in his three previous actions. At Belmont there was, as we know, no artillery preparation for the infantry assault, so it is out of the question to look for moral effect there. At Enslin Lord Methuen himself tells us in his despatch that, though the attack was well prepared by artillery fire, yet the fire of the Boers from the

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kopjes on the infantry advancing to the assault was heavy and well maintained; so the moral effect of the artillery preparation was not very encouraging here either.

At the battle of the Modder we know that, though the artillery fought with the utmost courage, and plied the enemy with shell for the whole day, yet the Boers remained in their trenches till after dusk, and all day maintained a hot fire in reply. So this again does not warrant such confidence in the moral effect of artillery fire as to justify a belief that a bombardment for two hours would either slay many of the Boers in their elaborate entrenchments, or would succeed in demoralising the survivors.

It is now clear that this preliminary bombardment resulted precisely as might have been anticipated by anyone of average intelligence, that is

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to say, it certainly failed to slay or frighten the Boers, but merely served to warn them that we were meditating an attack.

Now we come to the attack itself. It appears to have been the intention of Lord Methuen that the brunt of the attack was to fall on the Highland Brigade, who were to be led by night to within a short distance of the southern end of the great kopje of Magersfontein, with the intention of assaulting the trenches as soon as it was sufficiently light. Major Benson, an officer on his staff, had at great personal risk fixed the compass bearings and distance of the point to be assaulted, and we are told that the orders for the attack were explained to General Wauchope, who made no remark. At 12.30 a.m. the march commenced. The night was as dark as pitch, and shortly after the columns

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had moved off it began to rain very heavily. So dark was it, that Major Benson had to halt frequently to correct his bearings, and the four battalions of the Highland Brigade had to march in "mass of quarter columns," the closest formation in which so large a body could be moved. Had the troops been extended to a wider interval, it would have been quite impossible for them to have kept touch or direction. Under these circumstances, it was rash in the extreme to continue the movement, especially as two rifles had been accidentally discharged in our columns, an accident quite sufficient to give the enemy further warning that we were coming, were such warning needed. That it was not required may be inferred from Lord Methuen's statement, that there appears to have been little doubt that our movements were

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signalled by a lantern to the Boer lines. It would be interesting to know when this fact became known to him.

Now we come to the actual attack, and also to a very humiliating *exposé* of the manner in which a British general can bring himself to cast discredit on a fallen comrade in order to screen himself from well-deserved censure.

We can all remember, as we have all admired, Sir George White's chivalrous conduct in taking upon himself the entire blame for the disaster to Colonel Carleton's column at Nicholson's Nek. Very different is Lord Methuen's course of action. The heavy loss of the Highland Brigade and the consequent failure of the attack being obviously due to the close formation in which the Boer fire found our troops, a formation origin-

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ally due to Lord Methuen himself in having ordered the attack on so dark a night, we find his Lordship trying to shift the blame on to the shoulders of the late General Wauchope, by pointing out that Major Benson suggested a deployment five minutes before the orders for that movement were issued, and that Colonel Hughes-Hallett was of opinion that the Brigade might have deployed at least two hundred yards farther back. It is very doubtful whether a deployment five minutes earlier would have affected the issue at all. To suggest such a thing is in no way to Lord Methuen's credit. The attack, commenced so unfortunately, failed, as it was bound to fail.

The Highland Brigade, riddled by a biting fire, recoiled in disorder from the Boer trenches, and were with difficulty rallied and induced to remain

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in front of the enemy, though under cover, for the remainder of the morning. The sun rose in the heavens; the whole of our troops became engaged, the artillery storming the enemy's position with shrapnel and lyddite, the infantry, where possible, adding the fire of their rifles.

As the day advanced, the heat became overpowering. The shattered Highland Brigade, their nerves shaken by the awful ordeal through which they had passed, worn with fatigue,—they had marched off at 12.30 a.m.,—and tortured by an unconquerable thirst, could not apparently be held to their position, but retired about one o'clock. It is stated that someone ordered this retirement. Evidently it was against both Lord Methuen's wishes and his orders, as he states that the enemy were at the time quitting the trenches by tens and

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twenties. In spite of this fact, Lord Methuen appears to expect credit for having maintained his position opposite the enemy's trenches from noon until dark.

At a quarter - past seven firing ceased, and on the following day our army retired to its camp on the Modder, where it remained inactive till Lord Roberts assumed the direction of the campaign, and at once changed the whole aspect of affairs.

I do not think that further criticism of this despatch is needed. Most people have read it for themselves, and all who have done so will, I think, agree that it does not raise one's opinion of Lord Methuen. Having only been trained in the ornamental part of his profession, he was sadly found wanting when he had to play the commander in deadly earnest.

General Gatacre's despatch relating

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his experiences at Stormberg comes next in point of sequence. Few of us will forget the dismay which this disaster, following so soon after Magersfontein, produced in this country. It was, however, reserved for Sir Redvers Buller to administer an even heavier blow by his telegram announcing his reverse at Colenso.

To General Gatacre's despatch it is unnecessary to devote much space. He tells us quite simply how he trusted his army to the sole guidance of two white and two native police constables, who were popularly supposed to know intimately every inch of the ground round the enemy's position. There does not appear from the despatch to have been the slightest attempt, on the part of either General Gatacre or any of his staff, to personally reconnoitre the ground over which it was intended

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to march the troops by night to the assault of a strong position.

Having conspicuously failed in this, the first duty of a commander, he next proceeded to exhaust his men by a long railway journey in open trucks, under a tropical sun, followed by a night march over rough roads, lasting for several hours. He neglected the use of the simplest precautions to insure the co-operation of a detachment of his force at Penhoek, and when it became evident that the guides were at fault, he preferred to blunder on to his destruction, rather than to prudently retrace his steps and wait for a better opportunity.

Ultimately his exhausted soldiers found themselves, at dawn, face to face with the strongest part of the Boer position. That they were driven back with loss is in no way discreditable to them. The only

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wonder is that any of them got away at all.

In a few caustic words, Lord Roberts lays emphasis on some of Gatacre's blunders. It is difficult to conceive how any man professing to be a soldier, especially a man who had had considerable experience of active service, could expect an operation carried out in such a happy-go-lucky manner to achieve success. Gatacre is a man of great courage, of tireless energy, and devoted to his profession, yet we see that his training in our service has been so faulty that he has not known how to avoid mistakes which should have been obvious to the youngest student of war.

Colenso is the next battle for us to consider.

Everybody is so familiar with the maps of Natal, indifferent and faulty as they are, that it is unnecessary for

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me here to describe the relative positions of the opposing armies at Colenso. It will be sufficient to say that Sir Redvers Buller seems to have been without information of the exact position of the enemy, and that, consequently, he was to some extent surprised by the large force and the tremendous resistance which he encountered. There is one detail absolutely clear to us all now, and that is that the occupation of Hlangwane Hill would have enabled us to drive the Boers by enfilade fire from the kopjes north of the iron bridge. As it is plain that this was equally obvious to General Buller, as will be seen from the orders issued by General Clery, presumably under his direction, it is perfectly inexplicable why the first place in his plans was not given to the seizure of this hill, and the placing upon it of our powerful long-

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ranging battery of naval guns. We have seen how, at the final successful attempt to relieve Ladysmith, this course was adopted with instantaneous success. The only possible explanation of the error is to be found in the fact that Buller grievously underestimated the strength of the Boers, an error which is eloquent of that neglect of effective reconnaissance which marked the whole of the first part of this campaign.

The orders as to Hlangwane Hill were as follows :—"The Officer Commanding Mounted Brigade will move at 4 a.m. with a force of 1000 men and one battery of No. 1 Brigade Division in the direction of Hlangwane Hill; he will cover the right flank of the general movement, and will endeavour to take up a position on Hlangwane Hill, whence he will enfilade the kopjes north of the iron

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bridge." So it is clear that Buller or Clery recognised that from this hill the Boer positions could be enfiladed, but it is also clear that he attached so little importance to this, that he entrusted the seizure of the hill to an insignificant *mounted* force, to which no support was given during the action.

To this neglect of the tactical advantages offered by this hill, which at that time could have been taken without difficulty (it was in fact taken by the Colonials, who, being unsupported, had to withdraw), that our repulse at Colenso was chiefly due. It is generally supposed that we retired after the loss of Colonel Long's guns, but that loss could not have occurred had we had guns on Hlangwane Hill, as from its slopes our fire would have compelled the Boers to evacuate the southern bank of the river, whence

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their concealed riflemen were enabled to wreck the unsuspecting British batteries.

The episode of the guns is an unpleasant one, which I will refrain from raking up again. It is, however, worthy of notice that a precisely similar incident occurred at the Salisbury Plain manœuvres, and was thus referred to by Lord Wolseley in his remarks on the operations: "On the 6th September two horse batteries were captured, with little or no loss to the assailants, through coming into action in an exposed position, without any scouts to warn them of approaching enemies. When horse artillery batteries are in an exposed position, they must be protected from surprise, but at the same time the invariable provision of an escort, whether required or not, is often a useless waste of men." An interesting point about

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this incident is that the troops who captured the guns on this occasion were under General Buller's command.

Our other reverses at Spion Kop, and in the subsequent fighting near Potgieter's Drift, need not be referred to here; they are chiefly noticeable for the fact that General Buller himself ascribes them, very properly, to the fact that our troops were moving in an unknown country, against a very well-posted enemy of great mobility, and supplied with a powerful artillery. The fact that a British general is justified in describing operations conducted by a British force in a country which has been for over fifty years in our occupation, as "operations in an unknown country," speaks volumes for the absent-minded manner in which we make our preparations for war. Let us hope that such incidents will be unknown in future warfare, so far

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as we are concerned. If the costly lesson we have just received be not forgotten, the war will have done our army very much more good than harm.

There are scores of other incidents which I might cite from the history of the war, so far as it is yet known to us, which would tend to prove still more strongly my contention, that it is not the native incapacity of our leaders which was responsible for the muddle into which we plunged during the first few months of the war, but the absolutely fatuous system on which our soldiers of all ranks are trained, and the absent-minded manner in which we prepare our army for its serious duties.

We must in future take steps to insure the promotion of the best men while they are still young enough to learn, and are still active enough for hard work in the field. We must do

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away with advantages which the possession of private means now gives an officer over his fellows. We must pay our officers enough to enable them to live in a suitable manner on their pay. We must pay our men enough to attract suitable men to seriously take up the profession of arms. We must make a clean sweep of the theorists of the Staff College, and abandon that blind adherence to German methods which experience shows is quite unfitted to our needs ; and we must give our troops adequate opportunities and ample inducements to become efficient in the use of their weapons.

Above all, we must see that jobbery in staff appointments, for which our service has lately acquired such notoriety, is rendered impossible for the future, and we must establish a system by which the actual responsibility for

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wrongful omissions and commissions can be traced to the guilty party with speed and certainty.

We need an army which is an up-to-date fighting machine, not a mere organisation for the purpose of providing an elegant employment for the leisure hours of the wealthy classes. With the splendid raw material at our disposal, our army should be the finest army in the world, instead of being, as it was at the beginning of the war, but, thank God, is no longer, an army of lions led by ignoramuses.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRATEGY OF THE WAR

The Mistakes of the Boers—The Mistakes of the War Office—Political Meddlers—The Breaking-up of the Army Corps—More Reasons for our Reverses.

IN the foregoing chapters I have purposely refrained from any allusion to the strategy adopted by either side during the campaign, though the manner in which we employed our forces from the commencement of the war, till the arrival of Lord Roberts put a little sanity into the conduct of affairs, is open to the most unfavourable criticism. That of the Boers was, very fortunately for us, equally

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faulty. Had the Boers made the most of their opportunities at the commencement of the war, there is not the slightest doubt that their forces could have penetrated as far as Cape Town itself, raising the Dutch population in rebellion as they went, and the leading transports on their arrival might quite well have found Cape Town in ashes, and all the railways on which we would necessarily depend for the movement of our troops wrecked hopelessly.

When the war broke out, such was the state of preparedness in which our absent-minded Government had left Cape Colony, that there was absolutely no reason why the Boers should not have carried out this programme. Very fortunately for us, as we all know, the Boers allowed themselves to be seduced from their proper course by the prospect held out to them of

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laying violent hands on their especial *bête noir*, Mr. Cecil Rhodes, who at the opening of the war was in Kimberley. Accordingly, our enemies wasted their energies in attempts to reduce that town, attempts which, thanks to Lord Roberts' genius, were eventually frustrated.

On the other side of the theatre of war the efforts of the enemy were better directed. There they speedily shut Sir George White up in Ladysmith, and were proceeding to overrun Natal when the arrival of our reinforcements compelled them to withdraw again behind the Tugela.

Though they had thus achieved a certain measure of success, yet they had not succeeded to anything like the extent to which they should have. For instance, had they been properly handled, there is not the slightest doubt that they would have cut off and

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captured General Yule's force after the battle of Talana Hill ; and had they pushed their advantage to the utmost, instead of timorously dawdling along the way, they would have isolated Ladysmith before the day of Farquhar's Farm, and thus prevented the naval guns, which alone made the defence of Ladysmith possible, from reaching Sir George White, and they would also have thus kept General French, destined ere long to prove a thorn in their sides, from making his escape.

Thus the Boer strategy was full of faults ; otherwise it is impossible to doubt that we should have found the campaign infinitely more arduous than it has been. But if the Boers made mistakes, we were not in the least behind them. In the first place, it is impossible to conceive anything more criminal than the folly which invited

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war when we were absolutely unprepared, on the plea that adequate preparations would have provoked the war, which ministers now tell us was all along inevitable. There was a mere handful of troops in Cape Colony; in Natal the condition was little better till the arrival of the Indian troops a few days before the issue of the Boer ultimatum, and, owing to the action of the Government, the military authorities at home were crippled in their endeavours to purchase the mules necessary for the transport which would be required.

Our colonies possessed clearer-sighted statesmen than we did at home. So early as August they saw that war was inevitable, and it was in reply to their offers of assistance with armed forces that that notorious telegram was sent: "Infantry preferred." I would very much like to know who was re-

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sponsible for that masterpiece of folly. I fear it was none other than some high and responsible official in the War Office, since details as to the composition of the forces to be employed would naturally be left entirely to the military authorities. Though everyone knew full well that the Boer army would be practically a mounted army, to encounter which successfully the highest possible mobility on our part would be necessary, we find our absent-minded War Office calmly preparing to meet such an enemy with an army chiefly composed of slow-moving infantry.

Again, in Natal, all loyal colonists had been enrolled, supplied with rifles, and provided with a distinguishing mark in the shape of a metal brassard. Now it is inconceivable that these preparations should have been made with a view to any other eventuality

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than the invasion of Natal by the Boers, yet we find these loyal colonists forbidden from taking up arms in defence of their homes, though there is little doubt that they could have, unaided, repelled the raiding forces of the Boers which subsequently carried fire and sword through the Garden Colony.

The opening operations of the war on our side, as I have briefly described them, forbid our Government from making any claim to having shown either foresight or common sense in their conduct of the campaign. The next proceedings, following on the arrival of the army corps, the much-talked-of army corps, were equally foolish.

It is a military maxim that forces should be concentrated for war, that it is, in short, an act of folly which courts disaster to dissipate your strength in an endeavour to show a

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front in every part of the theatre of war. Yet that was precisely the course which General Buller adopted, not from choice, as I honestly believe, but in consequence of the pressure brought to bear on him by personages of political importance in South Africa. Ladysmith must be relieved, therefore a part of the army corps had to be sent to Natal; Kimberley must be relieved, therefore another portion was sent to De Aar; the invasion of Cape Colony must be checked, therefore what remained was dispersed along the line from Queenstown to Naauwpoort,—this distribution of our forces admirably insuring that we should be weak throughout the field of operations, and nowhere strong enough to effect anything. Moreover, the fact that an advance by the whole force across the Orange River on Bloemfontein would inevitably relieve

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Ladysmith, and so change the scene of the fighting from one eminently suitable to the Boers to one equally favourable to us, was entirely overlooked, or, if suggested, was scouted as "faulty strategy," till Lord Roberts' march on Bloemfontein proved incontestably the soundness of the argument.

It has been said that Buller relieved Ladysmith. There is little doubt that, had it not been for Roberts' threat to Bloemfontein, Buller might still have been knocking his head in vain against the rocky barriers from which the Boers could easily repel the most gallant efforts of the finest infantry in the world.

Throughout the earlier stages of the war, moreover, our tactics were as faulty as our strategy. We find in every case that our troops delayed their extension till too late, and in

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some instances failed in the end to extend to the interval necessitated by modern firearms. This is directly due to faulty teaching in peace time. If we look at Lord Wolseley's remarks on the Salisbury Plain manœuvres, we find that he points out very clearly the necessity of taking advantage of cover, though he advocates the keeping of battalions in close formation as long as possible in order to permit of accidents of ground being taken advantage of to provide cover.

The consequence is that officers, taken to task for prematurely extending their commands, and not understanding the reasons which alone made such extensions premature, kept their men too long closed up when entering a real battle, with the most unfortunate effects. The fact is that our officers are not encouraged to think for themselves, and are also deprived of all

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opportunities for acting on their own initiative, though such action must be taken constantly on service even by the most junior officer, owing to the wide extensions which become necessary under fire, and to the impossibility of correcting or altering the direction of a movement once troops are committed to an action.

We must remember in future, that once infantry are engaged in an attack, for instance, their officers must be left to work out their salvation in their own way. It will be quite impossible for gallopers to worry commanding officers with orders and counter-orders in the way they are worried on every field-day, for the very good reason that anyone galloping across the battlefield would almost inevitably be killed. Similarly, the mounted officers of each battalion are compelled, by circumstances over which they have

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no control, to dismount and play quite an insignificant part in the handling of the battalion, as soon as the troops come under close fire ; all will depend on the captains and company officers, yet in peace time these officers are never given the smallest opportunities of doing their own work unchecked by the colonel and the adjutant. A great part of our losses in this last war has been certainly due, first to the reluctance of brigadiers to deploy their commands in time, for fear they might get beyond their control (regimental officers apparently being quite unfit to be trusted out of reach of the brigadier), and, secondly, to the fear of commanding officers that if they extended their battalions too widely they would be unable to supervise the actions of officers commanding companies in the way they had been accustomed to at peace manœuvres.

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All of which brings us back to the original argument, that we have come well out of this war simply because our troops are composed of the best raw material in the world, and not in any way because their training has fitted them for war. In fact, we have won by sheer courage, aided considerably by superior numbers, and in spite of the radically faulty manner in which all our troops, from the private to the general officer, have for years past been trained for war.

CHAPTER VII

SOME POINTS TO BE LOOKED INTO

Short and Long Service — Our Officers — Our
Reserves — War Office Reform — Alterations in
Uniform — Artillery, Cavalry, and Transport.

IN this chapter, which will be a very brief one, I propose to make a few suggestions on matters affecting the future welfare of our army. It is almost certain, at least I should be very unhappy if I did not think so, that after this war is over the Government will initiate a series of reforms in order to remedy the very numerous defects in our army, in which I include both the regular troops and the auxiliary forces, and

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it is desirable that the public should take steps to see that certain very important points are not overlooked.

In the first place, I fear that an agitation may be started by well-meaning but ill-informed enthusiasts, with the object of forcing the Government to introduce a long-service system, on the plea that by our present organisation the home battalions of the army are never in a fit state to go on service till they are made up with reservists. That means, they argue, that we have no real reserves, but that all our so-called reserves are necessary to render the troops of the first line fit for service.

These reformers overlook the fact that these men were never intended to be reserves in that sense. They should be regarded simply as men in the front line who have been permitted to return to civil life on long furlough,

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on the understanding that if wanted they must rejoin. Our real reserves consist of our Militia and Volunteers. No effort must be spared to make these branches of the service really efficient; but it will be necessary to proceed with great caution if we do not want to destroy the forces which we hope to strengthen.

But there is another possible reserve, which would be a real reserve of the very highest value, which we have hitherto entirely overlooked. I refer to the host of men who have finally severed their connection with the army after twelve years' service, at the age—on an average—of somewhere about thirty. It has been calculated by the Government actuaries that there are never less than two hundred thousand men of this description, between the ages of thirty and forty-five, in this country. No scheme

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of army reorganisation will be complete which does not assure that these men shall be available when required.

The scheme must also provide for the comfort of our officers, by abolishing the existing expensive mode of life forced upon them, and by giving them pay on which they can live in reasonable comfort. Officers must also be encouraged to visit the manœuvres of continental armies, and to study their profession in all its branches.

On the public generally will rest the responsibility of seeing that adequate range accommodation is provided, both for the regular army and for the auxiliary forces. The allowance of ammunition for practice, and the inducements to strive after efficiency, must also be greatly increased; and even civilians must be encouraged to devote some time to rifle practice,

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in order to be able to assist in the defence of their country should they ever be required to do so.

That some attempt to reorganise the War Office, or more probably to induce the nation to believe that such an attempt has been made, will form part of the official programme, may also be taken for granted. This will require to be carefully watched. No scheme can be satisfactory which does not provide for a real measure of decentralisation, and also for a large reduction in the existing redundant civilian staff. The duties and responsibilities of the different departments must also be separated, so that it may be possible in the future to fix responsibility in the proper quarter.

At present this is absolutely impossible, the whole of the military and civil staff being screened from public reprobation by the personality

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of the civilian Secretary of State. One military officer, and one alone, must be the official adviser of the Secretary of State. At the present moment it is impossible to say who is responsible for the military advice on which the War Minister acts. It may be one of three officers. In consequence of this state of affairs, it is obviously unfair to blame the nominal Commander-in-Chief for all that goes wrong in the army, or for foolish military measures put in force by the Government. It is quite possible, nay, in some cases it is quite certain, that these measures have been taken in opposition to the advice of the Commander-in-Chief, and in deference to the opinion of an officer nominally his junior, but actually fully his equal in power and influence. This sort of thing must be put an end to.

I must confess I would like to see

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the Commander-in-Chief entrusted with the duty of attending the House of Commons in order to read a memorandum in explanation of the annual estimates, a memorandum in which he ought clearly to state his own views, whether they were being acted upon by the Secretary of State or not. This would enormously increase the power and the real responsibility of the military chief of the army, and could not, I think, but make for greater efficiency.

Again, the dress of our soldiers must be altered. For a working and fighting dress the soldier must be clothed in garments proved by experiment to possess the enormous advantage of invisibility. It is idiotic to send our troops to manœuvres in conspicuous uniforms which they could not wear for five minutes in real warfare and survive. How can any-

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thing useful be learnt under such conditions? How can the problems of modern warfare be studied at peace manœuvres, unless the conditions are assimilated as far as is possible to those which will prevail on a campaign?

What colour or combination of colours will be found to give the best results, I cannot pretend to say. I hope that the authorities will not jump to the conclusion that khaki is the thing, without trying careful experiments at home under different conditions of light and background. I hear that a War Office committee is sitting upon this subject, and it has been announced that they will shortly come to a common-sense decision. If they do, it will indeed be a new and astonishing termination to the sittings of a departmental committee.

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On the dusty South African veldt, in the mountains of Afghanistan, or in the deserts of the Soudan, khaki is as good a colour for invisibility as could be found ; it would, however, be unwise to jump to the conclusion that it would be as invisible in European countries.

There is a colour known to Indian sportsmen as shikarri mixture, a sort of greenish-grey, which is practically invisible in the jungle or when working among trees ; some blend of this colour and khaki might be better than the latter alone, but in any case the matter should be settled by careful experiments scientifically conducted.

There are one or two more points which must not be overlooked when we start reforming our army in earnest. We must not omit to provide an adequate proportion of artillery to work with the other arms, and that artillery

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must be of the newest and most efficient pattern. In this war our generals have been terribly handicapped both by the paucity of their guns and by their inferiority to the heavy guns of the Boers. In future a proportion of heavy guns, equipped on field carriages, must accompany every army corps into the field, and the number of field batteries must be largely increased. Neither artillery, cavalry, nor mounted infantry can be rapidly extemporised. It may be safe to rely largely on our reserves to fill up the ranks of our infantry battalions in war time, but the *cadres* of our artillery and cavalry must be kept full. The supply of trained horses from which remounts can be drawn must be enlarged, and means must be found for giving all cavalry, artillery, and mounted infantry reservists a short annual training, to maintain their efficiency.

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The subject of motor transport must also be studied. A great future lies before the motor in war; it would be rash at this moment to say that the steam-engine is more reliable than the petroleum or electric motor; experiments should be at once instituted to test their relative merits. The whole question of transport also requires looking into. British troops are badly handicapped by the enormous amount of baggage without which they are unable to move. Baggage must be cut down to a minimum, and this minimum must be enforced on manœuvres as on active service.

Tents also must be abolished, tents of the present army pattern I mean. Some substitute must be found for these incumbrances; it may either take the form of a shelter tent, of which each man should carry a section, as is the German custom, or some form

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of sleeping sack, in which the soldier can sleep sheltered from the weather by night, and in which he can carry his kit by day, may prove the best solution of the problem.

The above are just a few of the questions to be tackled, questions which must be tackled in earnest if we wish to make our army a thoroughly powerful and efficient fighting machine. I can well imagine the outcry which shortsighted people will raise at the very idea of the expenditure necessary to reorganise the army. Such an outcry must be faced, and must be disregarded, though we must at the same time insist on getting value for our money, which we are not likely to do under the administration of the War Office as it now exists.

People must be made to understand that war is the most serious and terrible thing possible, and that no

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sacrifices are too great to insure that, when it does come, as come it will, it shall not find us unprepared. Had we been as ready to at once put forward all our strength as the Transvaal was at the commencement of this war, we should have finished the campaign in a couple of months for about a fifth of the sum which it has already cost us.

We have immense resources, but we cannot develop them without time; in our next war we cannot rely on that time being given to us.

God grant that on the day on which we next find ourselves at war, we may be ready to meet our enemy in the gate, and crush him to the earth for good and all.

If this little book will only open our eyes in some slight degree to our faults in training and in organisation, it will have done as much as I could possibly

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hope. The defects pointed out are real defects, and deserve the attention of the public, if they wish to have a fighting force worthy of the great Empire it is enrolled to defend.

POST SCRIPTUM

SPION KOP DESPATCHES

SINCE the foregoing was written a most luminous document has been placed before the public, in the shape of the official despatches of Sir Redvers Buller and Sir Charles Warren, with a covering letter from Lord Roberts himself. It is not too much to say that the issue of these amazing documents has been received with a gasp of astonishment by the whole civilised world. Never have any generals been so "given away" by the Government which employed them! Never have any generals

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"given themselves away" with such palpable ingenuousness! Never has any Government displayed such reckless and cynical effrontery, or such callous disregard for the feelings of its officers.

The importance of these documents amply justifies me in the following short addition to this little book. We can all remember that when Buller was repulsed at Colenso, where the entrenchments of the Boers, ever growing in strength, interposed an insuperable obstacle to our advance, it became clear that some way round must be found if Ladysmith was to be relieved. It became a question of either going to the right or going to the left. Buller decided on the latter alternative, and began his preparations for a movement across Tritchard's and Potgieter's Drifts, by which he hoped to place himself on

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the flank and in the rear of the works which had so effectually barred his direct advance. These preparations were necessarily elaborate and took time; but at length everything was ready, Sir Charles Warren commanding five brigades, the Commander-in-Chief apparently only retaining one at his own disposal. Now it is clear that for such a movement to succeed it was important to keep the enemy in the dark as to our intentions, and to strike rapidly when concealment was no longer possible.

Though these considerations were clearly of such weight that anyone would imagine that some attention would be paid to them, this does not appear to have been the case.

On the contrary, though our intentions must have become clear to the enemy on the 17th January, on which day Warren crossed Tritchard's

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Drift, we did nothing but a little desultory fighting on the 18th, 19th, and 20th, till the 24th, when the ill-fated attack on Spion Kop was carried out. That is to say, the Boers had practically a week's breathing space, which they devoted to entrenching themselves, thus converting the mountain barrier confronting Warren into a position as formidable as that which had barred the more direct route to Ladysmith *via* Colenso. This was obviously the first and most serious error, and one which deprived the scheme of any strategical value which, properly executed, it would have had. Then we have the decision to seize Spion Kop, a decision which Sir Charles Warren came to after consulting his senior officers, and in which Buller eventually concurred.

But Buller and Warren were not by this time exactly on cordial terms.

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On the morning of the 23rd, the Commander-in-Chief rode over to see how his subordinate was getting on, and pointed out "that for four days he had kept his men continuously exposed to rifle and shell fire, perched on the edge of an almost precipitous hill, that the position admitted of no second line, and the supports were crowded close behind the firing line in indefensible formations, and that a panic or sudden charge might send the whole lot in disorder down the hill at any moment." Buller then "advocated"—a good word for what should have been an order from a general to his lieutenant—a movement to the left, to which Warren replied that he intended to take Spion Kop, and had selected General Coke to take it. Buller, apparently not a keen "advocate" for his own plan, consented to this, merely suggesting

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that General Woodgate, "who had two sound legs," should command. And so it was settled.

The attack was made and succeeded, and then came the muddle which led to the abandonment of the summit, and the consequent wasting of many valuable lives. Nothing went right; Woodgate was mortally wounded, and no one seemed to know who was in command. The senior regimental officer was superseded by Thorneycroft,—another "suggestion" by Buller,—and Thorneycroft appears to have been superseded in his turn by General Coke. The signallers were shot; the heliograph could only be intermittently worked, and when darkness came on it was found that there was no oil for the signalling lamps.

Neither Warren nor Buller realised the situation, and neither of them took the only possible measures to

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ascertain how things were going, for neither went near the scene of the fighting. For this Buller must not be blamed ; but Warren stands in a different position. Coke came down to confer with Warren, and preparations were made to get up guns to enable us to hold our position next day. But so soon as Coke had gone, Thorneycroft resumed command, and, in spite of the strong remonstrances of officers his senior in army rank, took upon himself the responsibility of ordering an evacuation. That is the story, and a miserable story it is.

On Buller's side a want of energy, a want of foresight, a want of "grip" ; on Warren's an entire want of organising power, a failure to gauge the situation, and generally a conspicuous absence of any military ability.

There is no need to touch upon the

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other names mentioned. If Buller had but thrown off his curious lethargy, and if Warren had only carried out his orders in the spirit and in the letter, the operations might have had a very different result.

It is clear enough now why the relief of Ladysmith took so long, and why the success, which seemed several times within our grasp, was on each occasion denied to us. There is no need to reproduce Lord Roberts's comments, so shrewd, so amply justified; comments which have lowered Buller's reputation and have exposed Warren in all the nakedness of his incompetence to the derision of Europe. But what are we to say of the Government which published these comments to the world, while there were still important military duties to be performed by these officers; the Government which de-

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to more advantage than in his contemptuous refusal to adopt so Jesuitical a suggestion. If our army does not breed great generals, it at least breeds honest gentlemen.

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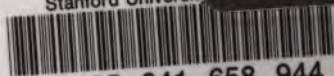
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